

THE AFTERMATH OF DETROIT'S ECONOMIC DECLINE AND THE EXODUS OF  
URBAN TEACHERS: A PHENOMENOLOGY

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the decision-making process of teachers, Kindergarten through twelfth grade, who left the urban setting in metropolitan Detroit. The theories that guided this study were Rotter's locus of control and Condorcet's decision theory as they investigated the experiences leading to teachers' decisions to leave the urban setting within metropolitan Detroit. Four research questions were included (a) How do select teachers describe the decision-making process they underwent before leaving urban education in metropolitan Detroit? (b) How do participants describe their experiences prior to their decision to leave urban education in metropolitan Detroit? (c) What factors do participants identify as contributing to their decisions to leave the urban education setting in metropolitan Detroit? (d) What do participants think about their decision since leaving urban education in metropolitan Detroit? Purposeful sampling was used to gain 10 teachers for this study. The participants taught in predominantly urban schools in metropolitan Detroit and left the field since 2009, the year three major car companies restructured and Detroit's economy took a turn for the worse. A triangulation method of (a) a focus group, (b) interviews and (c) member-checks were used. Data was coded and analyzed for themes. Results indicated three primary reasons for teachers' decisions to leave the urban setting within metropolitan Detroit (a) professional, (b) cultural and (c) political.

*Keywords:* urban education, locus of control, work locus of control, decision-theory, general education, special education

**Copyright Page**

### **Dedication**

*To my husband, Jeff, I dedicate this manuscript.*

*Without a doubt you believed in me from the moment I said, "I want my Doctorate."*

*To my precious daughter, Kaetlyn, you have lovingly prayed me through this process. You believed in me and cheered for me. I'm so proud to be your Mom.*

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### **List of Abbreviations**

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)

Teacher Education Program (TEP)

Professional Learning Community (PLC)

Work Locus of Control (WLOC)

Detroit Public Schools (DPS)

Detroit Federation of Teachers (DFT)

By Any Means Necessary (BAMN)

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)

Education Achievement Authority (EAA)

Teach for America (TFA)

Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS)

Free-Reduced Lunch (FRL)

National Writing Project (NWP)

Race to the Top (RTTT)

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **Overview**

Chapter One provides the premise of this study. It gives background to the problem of teacher retention, namely, teacher retention in urban education within metropolitan Detroit. In addition, it gives examples from research of the possible contributing factors toward teachers' decisions to leave the urban education setting within metropolitan Detroit and the subsequent effects on students' academic success. The manner the researcher is connected to this topic is discussed. The gap in qualitative literature that pertains to teacher retention within metropolitan Detroit was the impetus for this study.

Rotter's theory of locus of control (Rotter, 1991) and Condorcet's decision theory (Hansson, 2005) provided the framework for this this transcendental phenomenology. The research problem and purpose for the study are outlined. Four research questions which pertain to teachers' experiences within and decisions to leave urban education in metropolitan Detroit are explained. Terms frequently associated with this study, along with their definitions, are also included in this chapter.

### **Background**

"It is estimated that almost one-third of America's teachers leave the field sometime during their first three years of teaching, and almost one-half leave after five years...These statistics are even higher for low-income and rural areas" (Gujarati, 2012, p. 219). Educators shoulder a cornucopia of demands on a daily basis. In an era in which standards-based reform and data-driven instruction are in their most pervasive forms, teachers still bear the responsibilities of underlying tasks that accompany classroom teaching. Teachers are expected to raise their level of instruction to that of highly effective (Walker, 2011). The term highly

effective includes a philosophical belief that all students can learn (Walker, 2011). Teachers are deemed highly effective when students indicate high performance on standardized tests, an initiative of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (Walker, 2011). Yearly evaluations, on top of ongoing assessments throughout the school year, determine whether teachers maintained the rank of highly qualified, and in some states, whether or not subsequent employment contracts are offered.

Schools that have inadequate resources provide curricular obstacles for educators (Savasci & Ekber, 2013). Since the implementation of standards-based reform, teachers are held accountable to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) (Hunt et al., 2009). Among these variables, school culture can either increase teachers' sense of purpose or drastically dampen it (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009). Novice teachers may lack self-efficacy as teacher preparation programs may have devoted little time to their urban pedagogy (Siwatu, 2011). Experienced teachers of 10 or more years may have a difficult time adjusting to the changes in curriculum (Buchanan, 2010; Hughes, 2012).

Unremitting disparities escalate as the glaring achievement gap between urban, at-risk students and their suburban counterparts persists. Socio-emotional risks are concurrent to academic risks faced by urban students. Tobler, Komro, Dabroski, Aveyard, and Markham (2011) discussed that such socio-emotional and academic risks faced by urban students are not isolated to metropolitan Detroit, but are common throughout inner-cities nationwide. Students who are subject to poverty bring several socio-emotional and learning deficiencies to the classroom (Freedman & Appleman, 2009).

Though educators from all venues may define urban education differently, there are characteristics commonly voiced when urban education comes to mind (Milner, 2012). At the

surface, urban schools are labeled as such by attribute and populace (Milner, 2012). Urban schools are categorized in one of three ways (a) urban intensive, (b) urban emergent or (c) urban characteristic (Milner, 2012, p. 560). These categories depict the size of the city in which these schools reside, ranging from largest to smallest (Milner, 2012). Urban schools within metropolitan Detroit are classified as urban intensive, with predominantly African American students. Digging deeper, hallmark features unique to urban education include chronic problems with (a) scores on high-stakes tests, (b) high student absenteeism, (c) poor student initiative, (d) lack of decorum among students, and (e) insufficient parental involvement (Milner, 2012). In its most agreed upon form, *urban education* refers to the instruction of students from impoverished communities, representative of a low socioeconomic status, and a dearth of academic opportunities that yield an achievement gap between urban students and their suburban counterparts (Hampton, Peng, & Ann, 2008).

In pursuit of information about the discrepancies between urban and suburban schools, Kozol (1991) visited many urban areas in the nation. Kozol's (1991) findings led him to revisit the Supreme Court case of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). At the time his book *Savage Inequalities* was published, the ruling was close to four decades old. The same ruling, which declared segregated schools unconstitutional, recently surpassed its 60th anniversary. As suburban schools tend to serve predominantly Caucasian students and, urban schools, African American students, it can appear to some that educational segregation never left the scene (Kozol, 1991).

If students do not have the benefit of effective instruction, they run the risk of not achieving their full academic potential (Poplin et al., 2011). Educators at high-poverty urban schools face students who are deficient in effective learning strategies (Hatt, 2012). Little fault



of their own, these students do not share similar rich experiences as their wealthier counterparts (Carey, 2014). Risk factors that contribute to academic deficiencies may include (a) poverty, (b) child maltreatment, (c) low maternal education at birth, (d) homelessness, (e) inadequate prenatal care, (f) preterm/low birth weight, (g) lead exposure, (h) task engagement problems, and (i) poor attendance (Fantuzzo, LeBoeuf, Rouse, & Chen, 2012, pp. 563-565). If the deficiencies in learning are recognized and remedied in the elementary stage of school, it is believed urban students have a greater chance of academic success, namely in the subject areas of reading and mathematics (Fantuzzo, et al., 2012).

Unfortunately, not all factors are brought to light. Factors may include non-disclosure on the part of the parent(s) or an unawareness of the need to ask for such disclosure on the part of the school. If risk factors are known, there may be lack of skill on the part of the teacher on how to close the achievement gap or insufficient resources (Savasci & Ekber, 2013) to assist in the closure of the achievement gap. Savasci and Ekber (2013) purported that educational resources are vital components of a level playing field among all schools. Additionally, factors of (a) student-teacher ratio, (b) teachers' level of education, (c) school facilities, and (d) size of school library are influential in closing the achievement gap (2013). It comes as no surprise that teacher retention has become "a national crisis" (Gujarati, 2012, p. 218).

Several factors contribute to teacher attrition in Detroit. For example, uncertain job security (Teachers Continue to Leave Michigan, 2011) is one cause, as the number of graduates with elementary education degrees outweighs the number of job openings in the area (2011). As this imbalance of teachers to jobs ratio continues, fewer individuals are signing up for the degree of Elementary Education (Teachers Continue to Leave Michigan, 2011; Cook, 2015). Cook further added that variables such as (a) cuts in salaries and benefits, (b) deterioration of collective

bargaining rights, (c) evaluations tied to high-stakes testing, and (d) feelings of demoralization ; feelings of getting blamed for everything play a role in the decline of students enrolling in teacher preparatory programs (Cook, 2015). As light is shed on the factors causing teachers to leave the urban setting in metropolitan Detroit, it is hoped that a blueprint can be drawn and set into motion to remedy this epidemic.

Some research exists on teacher retention, but it is primarily quantitative or pertains to teacher burnout (Chang, 2009). Qualitative research is focused on middle and secondary schools located in other parts of the nation (Ng & Peter, 2010). Qualitative research on teacher retention pertaining to Michigan's metropolitan urban teachers is at the elementary level and scant, if not nonexistent or out-of-date (Anonymous, 1999; Chapman, 1983; Maxwell, 2006). A quantitative study was conducted on racial mismatch between teachers and students, but the data used for the study is more than a decade old (Renzulli et al., 2011). Donaldson (2009) conducted a study on the retention of graduates from Harvard's Teacher Education Program (TEP), who were prepared for urban schools, but the results were not generalizable.

This study sought to address the decision-making process of teachers who once taught in the urban sector of metropolitan Detroit, but left due to various reasons. The focus of the inquiry was not only the decision-making process, but also the experiences of the teachers that led to the decision to leave, as there is a gap in the literature between the economic downfall of Detroit in 2009 and subsequent effects on urban education (Santoro, 2011). Due to the study's situational locale of metropolitan Detroit, urban students symbolized African American students, as roughly 83% of Detroit's residents represent this race (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The locus of control was also examined as it pertained to the decision to leave the urban setting of metropolitan Detroit. This study will hopefully contribute to the literature as it seeks to reveal the impetus

behind several teachers' decisions to leave urban education in metropolitan Detroit. School administrators may benefit from this study as they seek to hire and retain effective teachers. Policymakers may benefit as they are made aware of circumstances that negatively affect curriculum and instruction. Finally, prospective teachers may benefit as they can make an informed decision of whether or not to enter the field of urban education in metropolitan Detroit, or any area.

### **Situation to Self**

I am a female Caucasian educator and have taught in an urban elementary charter school within metropolitan Detroit for eight years. The school is located within the suburbs of metropolitan Detroit and serves predominantly African American students who mostly reside in Detroit. I have experienced the multitude of top-down changes that pertain to standards-based reform from the inception of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 (NCLB) to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). I have seen teachers, both novice and experienced, leave the profession due to reasons such as (a) burnout, (b) job attainment in a suburban school, (c) standards-based reform mandates, (d) workplace conditions, or the (e) economic downfall in Detroit. I have a strong desire to see students in urban school settings succeed. I am concerned that the high rate of teacher turnover hinders students' academic success. I took an ontological approach as I sought to identify and understand both the locus of control and decision-making process of teachers who left the urban setting in metropolitan Detroit. I used a constructivist approach to drive this study (Patton, 2002).

The philosophy of constructivism finds its base in ontological relativity. Ontological relativity is significant in that individuals can have different interpretations of the same or similar phenomenon (Patton, 2002). Through this approach, I identified the interpretations of 10

participants who left the field of urban education, Kindergarten through twelfth grades, in metropolitan Detroit. These interpretations included, but were not limited to (a) thoughts, (b) feelings, (c) experiences, and (d) opinions of the participants.

### **Problem Statement**

The problem is research has shown that teacher turnover can negatively impact student success (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009). Urban students are customarily behind their suburban counterparts academically, and cannot afford the ramifications of high teacher turnover (Pollack, 2013). Resultant of the economic tragedy in metropolitan Detroit, the city has curtailed funding for area schools (Cave, 2010). Budget cuts led to school closings, which led to families seeking new schools or staying in their current schools and dealing with the negative impact. The charter school movement grew as a result of closed public schools, of which many low-performing students now fill the seats (Stuit & Smith, 2012).

Insufficient funding is only part of the problem. Teachers are not always adept to teach in an urban environment (Celik & Amaz, 2012). In addition to the latest challenges of standards-based reform, educators enter the classroom and face students who are deficient in effective learning strategies (Hatt, 2012). Instructors may feel demoralized, carrying a perpetual feeling of “this isn’t what I signed up for.” An understanding of the circumstances behind teachers’ decisions to leave the urban setting was needed. This study sought to address the decision-making process of 10 teachers who once taught in the urban sector, but left due to various reasons.

Teachers in the urban setting also encounter variables such as (a) a lack of background knowledge on part of the students, (b) a difference in learning styles among urban students as compared to their suburban counterparts (Watkins, 2002) and (c) a general difference in

socioeconomic status among urban students, thus placing (them) on an unequal playing field for an education (Nunn, 2011). Further, charter schools receive less funding than public schools, which also puts teachers and many students (many who are African American) at an automatic disadvantage. The issue of teacher retention as it pertains to the urban sector of metropolitan Detroit, in this study, does not pertain to negative retention, in which a teacher's contract is not renewed due to areas such as (a) school budget, (b) teacher ineffectiveness, or (c) disciplinary reasons. Rather, this inquiry focused on the experiences of the teachers that led to the voluntary decision to leave urban education in metropolitan Detroit since 2009.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the decision-making process of teachers, Kindergarten through twelfth grade, who voluntarily left the urban setting in metropolitan Detroit, since 2009. The reason for this timeframe was to determine the effects, if any, the downfall of the automotive industry in 2009 and Detroit's subsequent economic undoing had on teachers' decisions to leave urban education within metropolitan Detroit. Ten teachers who formerly taught within an urban school setting in metropolitan Detroit were included in this study. Participants taught in the urban sector, in either a general or special education classroom, for at least two years in the metropolitan Detroit area. For the purposes of this research, the decision-making process was defined as the factors, whether single or a culmination, that led teachers to leave the urban setting in metropolitan Detroit. The theories that guided this study were Rotter's (1991) locus of control and Condorcet's (Hansson, 2005) decision theory as they investigated the experiences that led to teachers' decisions to leave the urban setting within metropolitan Detroit.

Rotter's theory of locus of control pertains to an individual's "control of reinforcement" and is either internal or external (Rotter, 1990, p. 1). An internal locus of control attributes one's circumstances to his or her choices in personal behavior. Those with an external locus of control ascribe their circumstances to factors outside of their control. Teachers who left the urban setting ascribed to an external locus of control.

Decision theory was first introduced by Condorcet, a philosopher during the Age of Enlightenment (Hansson, 2005). Decision theories are either normative or descriptive. Relative to this study was descriptive decision-theory, which pertains to "how decisions are actually made" (Hansson, 2005, p. 6). This gave insight to factors which contributed to teachers' reasons to leave urban education.

### **Significance of the Study**

The city of Detroit is often in the news media and rarely is the city portrayed in a positive light. It was said, "There is no more compelling story today of the dark side of America's urban experience than the slow death of the city of Detroit" (Eisinger, 2013, p. 1). The city that once housed close to two million people now holds less than half of its original size (Desan, 2014). Resultant of the economic demise, multiple homes and buildings stand unoccupied and uncared for (Meitner, 2011). It is common for casual observers to think of Detroit as poverty-stricken, full of crime, and futile in terms of educating its youth.

Empirical significance of this study is supported in literature pertaining to challenges teachers face. Teachers are challenged and expected to raise their level of teaching to that of highly effective (Walker, 2011). The term highly effective includes a philosophical assumption that all students can learn (Walker, 2011). Teachers are deemed highly effective when students indicate high performance on standardized tests, an initiative of the NCLB of 2001 (Walker,

2011). Referred to as culturally relevant pedagogy in the multicultural realm, to which Ladson-Billings (2014) deemed it culturally sustaining pedagogy, culturally relevant teachers focus on (a) student learning and academic achievement rather than classroom and behavior management, (b) cultural competence rather than cultural assimilation or eradication, and (c) sociopolitical consciousness rather than school-based tasks that are not applicable outside of the school walls (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 78).

On a practical level, it is significant to hear the voices of teachers within metropolitan Detroit's education setting. It is through the lens of each participant that thoughts, feelings and experiences are shared and empirical literature takes new meaning. As urban students in general continue to fail through the lens of standardized tests (Walker, 2011), it is necessary to ascertain reasons behind teachers' decisions to leave the urban setting. If Detroit and its surrounding areas are to have a chance of producing successful students, there must first be an understanding of what makes teachers leave. Only with a true understanding can proper action be taken to prevent teacher turnover. It is hoped that future studies can build on the results of this study and develop a plan to retain teachers in metropolitan Detroit.

In addition, the socio-emotional and academic risks faced by urban students are not isolated in metropolitan Detroit. The struggles these students face are common throughout inner-cities nationwide (Tobler et al., 2011). An examination of the factors that led to teachers' decisions to leave urban education can catapult into strategies to effectively retain them (Hughes, 2012; Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2012). The results of this research may make positive contributions to research pertaining to teachers' retention in urban education throughout the country.

Finally, colleges and universities that offer teacher preparation programs in urban education need to show consistency among course offerings and requirements (Assaf, Garza, & Battle, 2010; Celik & Amaz, 2012). If pre-service teachers receive a consistent education that sufficiently qualifies them to teach within the urban schools, teacher retention could increase considerably (Freedman & Appleman, 2009). Consistency among teacher preparation programs could provide administrators a framework within which to hire highly qualified teachers equipped to teach in an urban context (Goldenberg, 2014; Schultz, 2010; Siwatu, 2011). A skilled teacher entering the urban school setting will have a higher self-efficacy than one who is unskilled. An urban school which is encompassed by highly qualified teachers is said to show overall school-wide improvement (Klassen, Tze, Betts, & Gordon, 2011). Thus, student achievement can be traced back to teacher preparatory programs.

Theoretical significance for this study is found in Rotter's (1991) theory of locus of control and Condorcet's decision theory (Hansson, 2005). Rotter's theory of locus of control focuses on the push-and-pull of experiences that lead to an individual's subsequent action(s). Locus of control can be external, internal or a combination of both (Rotter, 1991). With regard to this study, it is expected that participants' decisions to leave the urban education setting within metropolitan Detroit were externally influenced. Condorcet's decision theory focuses on various types of decision-making as well as how such decisions are made. The implementation of this theory and Rotter's (1991) locus of control helped formulate the research questions.

### **Research Questions**

In light of the purpose of this study, the following questions framed this research:



### **Research Question 1**

How do select teachers, Kindergarten through twelfth grade, describe the decision-making process they underwent before leaving urban education in metropolitan Detroit? In order to understand the decision-making process, it was necessary to identify the push-and-pull of thoughts and feelings that teachers experienced leading up to, and during, the decision-making process. Nusrat and Yamada (2013) found that “humans might make different decisions due to combined effects of attitudes to risk and ignorance as well as the weighting function of probabilities” (Nusrat & Yamada, 2013, p. 99).

### **Research Question 2**

How do participants describe their experiences prior to their decision to leave urban education in metropolitan Detroit? The purpose of this question was to examine the factors that precluded the desire of educators to continue teaching in the urban sector. Since several reasons were plausible, it was necessary to shed light on the driving force, or external locus of control, behind teachers’ decisions to leave. “Once in the workforce, teachers continue to assess the benefits of teaching compared with other employment options with a new understanding of the working conditions in teaching” (Hughes, 2012, p. 245).

### **Research Question 3**

What factors do participants identify as contributing to their decisions to leave the urban education setting in metropolitan Detroit? “Any analysis of a decision must start with some kind of demarcation of the decision” (Hansson, 2005, p. 68). The purpose of this question was to delve deeper into the realm of the decision-making process of teachers to leave the urban setting of Detroit since 2009. Specific reasons participants gave for leaving the urban education setting in Detroit since 2009 were sought.

#### Research Question 4

What do participants think about their decision since leaving urban education in metropolitan Detroit? Decisions “can be performed in the realm of certainty, risk, uncertainty, and ignorance” (Nusrat & Yamada, 2013, p. 80). Such a decision to leave urban education held several personal, social, and emotional factors for the teacher and those within the teacher’s direct line of influence, such as family. In order to gain an understanding of the big picture, it was important to see the interrelatedness of one’s decision to leave and the effects of that decision. As teachers reflected on the consequences of their decision to leave urban education, they possibly solidified their reasons for leaving the urban field.

#### Definitions

*Decision theory* – Decision theory describes how decisions are made. Decisions are either based on calculated and sequential steps, or the result of abstract experiences and thus, non-sequential steps (Hansson, 2005).

*General education* – General education refers to classes taught by non-special education teachers (Boe, Bobbitt, & Cook, 1997).

*Locus of control* – A term coined by Rotter in the early 1900s, locus of control refers to the perceived amount of control an individual has over a certain situation. Locus of control is internal, external, or generally a combination of both (Rotter, 1990).

*Special education* – Special education refers to “specifically designed instruction to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability. Specially designed instruction, in turn, refers to the content, methodology, and delivery of this instruction” (Morse, 2001).

*Urban education* – Urban education refers to the instruction of students from impoverished communities, representative of a low socioeconomic status, and a dearth of

academic opportunities that yield an achievement gap between urban students and their Caucasian counterparts (Hampton, et al., 2009).

### **Summary**

This chapter provided the rationale behind the study of teacher's decisions to leave the urban setting within metropolitan Detroit. Background information of Detroit's economic history was provided. Academic, socioeconomic, and social challenges faced by urban students were introduced. This chapter highlighted the theoretical frameworks of decision theory and locus of control as important to discovering the reason teachers left the urban setting, Kindergarten through twelfth grade, of metropolitan Detroit post 2009, the year the automotive industry faced a major financial crisis. Finally, this chapter delineated how the situation related to the researcher, including the researcher's role in urban education and philosophical base; the problem statement, purpose statement, significance of the study, research questions, research plan and definitions of keywords.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Overview**

The focus of the literature contained herein this chapter begins with a discussion of the theories framing this study (a) locus of control and (b) decision theory. An analysis of the problems surrounding Detroit's financial crisis follows, including a close look at its effects on education and attempts made to remedy the educational system. This chapter will examine (a) the issues surrounding teacher retention in urban schools, (b) necessary characteristics of urban school teachers, (c) challenges faced by urban school teachers, and (d) a discussion on special education, parental involvement, and teacher preparation programs.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Two theories provided the framework for this transcendental phenomenology. Rotter's (1991) locus of control and Condorcet's decision theory (Hansson, 2005). The theory of locus of control supported the idea that participants experienced a factor, or a series of factors, that were seemingly out of their control and negatively affected the outlook on their career. For the purposes of this study, Rotter's (1991) locus of control was married with Condorcet's decision theory (Hansson, 2005), as experiences motivate action. This study sought to understand the experiences that prompted participants' decisions to leave the urban education setting within metropolitan Detroit, post 2009.

### **Locus of Control**

A native of Brooklyn, New York, Julian B. Rotter was deeply interested in and conducted vast amounts of research on the topic of "choice and perceived control" (*Awards*, 1989, p. 625). Locus of control, the term that Rotter assigned this concept in the early 1900s, can either be internal or external. An internal locus of control is one in which individuals perceive having an empowerment of choice. An external locus of control has the opposite effect, in which

extraneous circumstances determine one's next steps (Rotter, 1990, p. 489). Both loci of control are not necessarily experienced independent of one another; rather, individuals generally experience both an internal and external loci of control (Glogow, 1986).

In the late 20th century, Spector altered Rotter's theory to suit the workplace specifically (Fitzgerald & Clark, 2013). Individuals with an external work locus of control (WLOC) think that they have little control over events and circumstances in the workplace, such as promotions and career advancement (Oliver, Jose, & Brough, 2006). On the other hand, individuals with an internal WLOC believe that they are responsible for their achievement and their failures in the workplace and that they can control their surroundings. Based on social learning theory, individuals with an external WLOC are not as likely to respond to reinforcement contingencies as individuals with an internal WLOC. Additionally . . . one's WLOC might vary over time. That is, WLOC may affect behavior, the outcomes of which may affect WLOC. Thus, WLOC and the consequences of actions might engage dialogically as to influence the other over time (Fitzgerald & Clark, 2013, p. 60).

### **Decision Theory**

According to philosopher Condorcet, Decision theory finds its roots in The Age of Enlightenment (Hansson, 2005). In its broadest sense, decisions are based on intended purpose and available choices. There are two overarching types of decisions under decision theory (a) normative and (b) descriptive. Normative decision theory is scientific in nature and warrants a calculation of steps based on reason. Descriptive decision theory focuses on how decisions are made (Hansson, 2005).

Decisions generally fall into two categories (a) those that are calculated and sequential and (b) those that are a result of abstract experiences, or non-sequential (Hansson, 2005).

Condorcet utilized a calculated, sequential method that consisted of deeply analyzed steps. The first record of his process was traced to France's 1793 constitution (Hansson, 2005, p. 9). As with any theory, man extends ideas through the process of amendment. Among those who shaped decision theory to suit the present-day were John Dewey, Herbert Simon, and Brim et al. These theorists maintained Condorcet's sequential method of decision-making, yet expanded the number of steps from three to six, and included adaptations for organizations (Hansson, 2005 p. 10). As every theory has its supporters, it also has its critics. Among the faultfinders is Witte who contended that human decisions are made based on a culmination of events and steps preempting such decisions cannot be placed in a consecutive order (Hansson, 2005, p. 10). Supporters of Witte's view included Mintzberg, Raisinghani, and Theoret (Hansson, 2005, p. 10).

Decision theory can also find its base in probability or uncertainty (Hansson, 2005). Decisions made under the formula of probability use a statistical method. Individuals and organizations can determine potential outcomes by measuring data. When teachers make a decision on whether or not to leave their current school environment, they can factor in their experiences, but such experiences are not typically recorded and measured. Teachers who fit this description fall under the decision of uncertainty rather than probability. At first, they will experience certain events, either in number or magnitude, and begin to compare their current state with their initial goals. Then, depending on the situation, they will move to a stage of uncertainty, where they begin to weigh their options. Teachers who decided to leave their school system believed their negative circumstances outweighed their moral decision to begin teaching. Their decision to leave was worth the risk. This type of decision-making based on uncertainty is also referred to as fuzzy decision theory (Hansson, 2005).

Another component of decision theory is known as classical ignorance, or decision-making under unknown possibilities (Hansson, 2005). In this sense, ignorance does not refer to a lack of education. Rather, it refers to a lack of information. For example, an individual receives an invitation to a holiday party. The party begins at 7:00 PM, but there is no mention of whether or not dinner will be served, or just appetizers. The individual does not want to ask what will be served, but wants to make sure he or she has enough to eat. Under the decision theory of classical ignorance, the individual decides to eat just enough to feel satiated before attending the party. That way, he or she still feels as though dinner can be eaten, should it be served, or not feel hungry throughout the evening if only appetizers are available. The decision under classical ignorance means that the outcome was unclear, thus the individual made what he or she felt was the best decision under the circumstances (Hansson, 2005). In light of teacher's experiences within the urban setting, Kindergarten through twelfth grade, and their decision to leave, a descriptive approach is warranted. Human decisions based on either a single event or a culmination of experiences within a setting cannot always be analyzed sequentially, or rationally, to appease scientists (Hansson, 2005).

### **Related Literature**

A child stands at the corner of a city street. To the left is a concrete slab surrounded by a fence. To the right is a party store that sells liquor, lottery tickets, and pizza. The child walks down the street and sees houses with wood where glass was once used for windows, unstable porch steps, and broken-down cars in the driveway. As the child walks, he or she may hear the sounds of babies crying, children playing, parents yelling, or even sirens in the distance. The concrete slab is the neighborhood playground. The street is where the child lives. This street resembles many neighborhoods in which urban students reside.

## **Detroit**

Situated between the United States and Canada, not far from the aquatic border, lies the city of Detroit (Farmer, 1890). Those older than five decades can remember the city for its beauty and charm. Through books and photographs, they speak of Detroit in its former state with a simultaneous sense of awe and sadness for what once was (Meitner, 2011).

Once a growing metropolis, Detroit now brings to mind images of poverty and crime. The city of Detroit has faced a continual uphill economic battle. Recent government attempts to thwart financial disaster of the automotive industry in 2009 were futile (Albright, 2009). Two major car industries, part of what is known as the Big Three, were unable to meet financial obligations (Desan, 2014). The fragmented results led to closed area businesses and loss of jobs (Desan, 2014).

The deterioration of one of Detroit's most profitable industries is not the only problem. Desan (2014) contends that Detroit's bankruptcy resulted as a culmination of "economic decentralization and racial segregation" in addition to unequal distribution of wealth and services (Desan, 2014, p. 122). Detroit did not begin as an African American community (Katzman, 1973). Following the end of the Civil War, Caucasians gravitated toward Detroit and settled there. Though the Civil War had ended and the Emancipation Proclamation had been signed into action, slavery was still practiced in the nation and African Americans found themselves unwelcome in the city (Katzman, 1973). Though not completely shunned from living in Detroit, African Americans experienced continued segregation in churches and schools.

The growing beauty and popularity of one of Detroit's most famous avenues, Woodward Avenue, set the development of the city in motion for fashion and industry during the mid-nineteenth century (Katzman, 1973). The railroad system was put in place in Detroit and the



upper echelon of society began to move away from the inner-city and toward the surrounding subdivisions at the same time Detroit's population nearly doubled, between the years of 1884 and 1890 (Katzman). While Caucasians moved toward the suburbs, African Americans and immigrants took up residence in the newly emptied homes, choosing convenience over affordability. Ethnicities representative of that time included Irish, German, Polish, Russian, Jews, Poles, and Italians, which later expanded to include immigrants from Greece and Hungary in 1910. As individuals and families moved to and from the inner city of Detroit, the only population that remained a constant presence was that of the African American (Katzman, 1973).

Detroit has experienced a decentralization of races since the majority of Whites moved to its suburbs as early as the 1960's (Vojnovic & Darden, 2013). Industry has taken a backseat and skilled labor is almost a thing of the past. The resulting loss of revenue from the loss of these jobs undoubtedly contributed heavily to the most recent bankruptcy of Detroit in 2013 (Desan, 2014). Now the schools in Detroit face dire consequences as well.

There is an ancient proverb that states, "There are two sides to every story" (Proverbs 18:17 English Standard Version). Some have taken this quote a step further by stating, "There are three sides to every story—your side, his side, and the truth" (Quotable Quotes, n.d.). Humans undoubtedly bring their own ideas, views, and opinions to any given situation. With regard to the cause of Detroit's economic downfall(s) and the effects on urban African American students, the lens of truth will remain clouded. Notwithstanding, reports continue to surface as examiners seek a solution for "the most dangerous city in America" (Desan, 2014, p. 123).

Multiple studies surround current events in education such as (a) teacher retention, (b) urban education, (c) teacher preparatory programs, and (d) standards-based reform. In an effort to close the achievement gap, schools nationwide are required to instruct students according to a

predetermined set of standards. Throughout the years, administrators and educators experienced top-down changes in regard to curriculum, standardized tests, and best practices for teaching. Standards-based reform was first redesigned under NCLB and now it is masquerading as Race to the Top, as each initiative was designed to improve on the former. Teachers are required to attend professional learning communities (PLCs) and show fidelity among grade-levels. Teachers are evaluated on student test scores. The only freedom teachers have is in the delivery of the lesson. Yet this is changing now, too, as leaders now encourage teachers to take a constructivist approach rather than traditional.

The unforgiving sine qua nons filtered through federal policies place an even greater burden on schools with a poor socioeconomic status, a characteristic common to the urban education sector. Socio-emotional and learning deficiencies are brought to classrooms by students who are subject to poverty (Freedman & Appleman, 2009). Additionally, parents are now centrifugal to their children's education as the responsibility for student academic achievement has shifted from families to schools (Carbonaro & Coway, 2010). Struggles are compounded as teachers of urban students report (a) inadequate resources, (b) professional isolation, (c) classroom management issues, (d) lack of professional support, and (e) feeling unprepared for teaching in diverse schools (Andrews & Quinn, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2003; & Sprague & Pennell, 2000 as cited in Durham-Barnes, 2011, p. 1). Detroit is no exception.

Articles continue to emerge on the economic state of Detroit, especially since its collapse of the Big Three in 2009. Detroit continues to plummet fiscally with its most recent bankruptcy mid-2013 (Desan, 2014). This study sought to highlight the experiences teachers of urban students within metropolitan Detroit faced during its most recent years of financial crisis. It sought to understand the decision process teachers made to either leave urban education or

education altogether as a result of their experiences. Both locus of control and decision theory formed the basis of this study as the reasons behind teachers' decisions to leave the urban setting in metropolitan Detroit were sought. The reader will be able to see a majority of factors that influenced teachers in the urban workforce and how such factors possibly played a role in their decisions to leave the urban setting of metropolitan Detroit.

**An exodus.** Michigan schools lose \$27 to \$59 million annually due to teacher attrition, with nationwide costs lingering past the \$2 billion mark (Smith, 2014). One news report (Teachers Continue to Leave Michigan, 2011) noted that a teacher in her early 20s attributed uncertain job security in either the inner-city or suburban districts as her reason for leaving the state. According to the report, she was not alone. The 24-year-old Lansing resident was one of hundreds of new teachers leaving for positions in other states, a reflection of Michigan's wealth of teaching colleges, shrinking number of students and budget woes that have forced schools to cut staffs (Teachers Continue to Leave Michigan, 2011).

In fact, the state loses close to 70% of its college graduates to other states, but gaining employment elsewhere is becoming equally challenging due to nationwide budget cuts. Martin Ackley, a spokesman for the Michigan Department of Education, attached the lack of jobs to the imbalance of teachers holding certificates to the level of need, along with a mismatch of type of teacher certification to the amount of jobs available. As college-aged students are recognizing the teacher job shortage, less are signing on for the 4-year experience, and are choosing different degree paths. Despite the fact that fewer teachers are enrolling in teacher preparatory programs, "the exodus of new teachers to other states likely will continue. Michigan was the only state to lose population over the past decade, according to the 2010 census" (Teachers Continue to Leave Michigan, 2011).

Four years later, individuals who once considered entering the education arena continue to resist the field (Cook, 2015). A drop in numbers in teacher preparatory programs are often attributed to (a) cuts in salaries and benefits, (b) deterioration of collective bargaining rights, (c) evaluations tied to high-stakes testing, and (d) feelings of demoralization; feelings of getting blamed for everything (2015).

The best and brightest did not enter the profession to teach students to score well on a standardized test. Variables like early childhood education, childhood poverty, hunger, homelessness and domestic abuse are all factors that weigh heavily on student performance (2015).

Other teachers have left or considered leaving due to the layoffs and callbacks that occur annually. Michigan now has laws in place to hold effectiveness over years in the field when deciding whose job is secure, which could help new teachers keep their jobs (Teachers Continue to Leave Michigan, 2011). Another reason teachers leave is due to *teacher churn*, a system used in various states in the country, including Michigan. The motive behind teacher churn is to “encourage more experienced and expensive teachers to leave so that younger and less expensive teachers can move into those spots”, a money-saving approach (Robberson, 2015). However, a report from Ingersoll (2014) stated that the opposite was occurring, and states were, in fact, losing millions of dollars (as cited in Robberson, 2015). Worse than a fiscal loss schools experience from teacher attrition, however, is the hit students take to their education (Smith, 2014).

The teacher to job ratio provides some explanation for those that want to teach in Michigan, yet are forced to find occupations elsewhere. Teacher churn and trouble with Michigan teacher unions also provided a glimpse on the problem with teacher retention.

However, the above findings do not discuss teachers who leave for other reasons. Research remains non-existent as to other reasons teachers leave the profession within metropolitan Detroit.

**A state of emergency.** The educational epidemic in Detroit remains a part of the local, state and national spotlight. It has been a subject of political and personal controversy as stakeholders seek a long-awaited solution. In 2009, Governor Granholm appointed Robert C. Bobb as Emergency Manager of Detroit Public Schools (DPS). During Bobb's two-year term, he was faced with the daunting challenge of taking a school district that United States Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, compared to Hurricane Katrina, and turning it around (Aarons, 2009). Bobb's investigations resulted in (a) the closing of 29 schools, (b) the restructuring of 40 schools, (c) FBI investigation for cases of fraud, (d) elimination of more than half of the district's top executive positions, and (e) the layoff of more than 1,700 employees. Each of these actions were steps toward the elimination of deficit spending, as the district had positions its budget could not support (2009). Bobb faced two lawsuits during his term due to (a) public question of his salary, which was eventually determined legitimate and (b) public claims of his acting out of his scope of authority "by making academic decisions", which was won by the school board (Bowman, 2013, p. 4).

In 2011, Rick Snyder was appointed Michigan's Governor. He appointed Roy Roberts as Bobb's successor (Bowman, 2013). Roberts did not complete his term unscathed as he also found himself in litigation as DPS union representatives protested the "emergency manager's authority to unilaterally change collective bargaining agreements" a dispute that was eventually resolved (Bowman, 2013, p. 4). In 2013, Snyder declared Detroit a state of emergency and appointed Kevyn Orr to the position of emergency manager the same year (Davey, 2013). Orr, a

bankruptcy lawyer who had previously aided in Chrysler's bankruptcy, described this feat as "the Olympics of restructuring" (Davey, 2013). Even though Orr did not desire a municipal bankruptcy, it was under his authority that Detroit did, indeed, experience the largest municipal bankruptcy in the nation (Desan, 2014). A little more than one year later, Orr agreed to see the bankruptcy through, but return control to Mayor Duggan (Guillen & Helms, 2014).

In January 2015, Snyder appointed Darnell Earley as the fourth emergency manager of DPS, a decision met with great opposition (Zaniewski, 2015). The Detroit school district felt that control should have been returned to local control by now, a sentiment that was echoed by Snyder. Governor-elect Rick Snyder, the authority currently behind the reform efforts of DPS, desires to see control placed back in the hands of "a superintendent and elected school board", something residents never wanted to see placed under state control under the previous governor, John Engler (MacDonald, 2010, p. 1).

In late April 2015, Governor Snyder announced his plan to "overhaul" the DPS system, a plan that would,

Divide the district into two 'companies'. One would be the old one which would take care of millions of dollars of debt. The other would be a new company that will focus on educating the 47,000 at Detroit Public Schools. Gov. Snyder says his coalition put together the plan. (Langston, 2015, p. 1)

Snyder believes that this plan will keep the educational welfare of Detroit's students at the forefront, and make an excellent education possible (Langston, 2015). This announcement was overwhelmingly unwelcomed by Detroit educators, as the schools in Detroit believe that decisions should be made at the local, rather than state level. Detroit's Federation of Teachers (DFT) President, Steve Conn, was quoted for the following: "What's being done here is

unconscionable. It's destruction of the city, the community, and its people" (Langston, 2015, p.1). Further, Conn said that teachers will do whatever it takes to make sure this plan doesn't stick. He threatened rallies, marches, civil rights protests, and even strikes to get people to defend public education. However, state law states they can't strike and they could face penalties (Langston, 2015).

Steve Conn, a civil rights activist for DPS, was appointed President of the DFT in January 2015 (Zaniewski, 2015). Prior to his election, Conn worked as a mathematics instructor in a DPS secondary school. While he claims the importance of smaller class sizes, he is known by his predecessor, Keith Johnson, as one who likes to complain. Conn, who ran for the position numerous times, won by 15 votes (Jacques, 2015; Zaniewski, 2015).

Some members of the DFT echoed Johnson's remarks, and were displeased with the "negativity" and "direction" Conn was taking the union (Jacques, 2015, p. 1). Members expressed that there is a better way to handle the opposition to Snyder and Earley's plan that involves calm communication, rather than rallies and protests (Jacques, 2015). Conn has been said to spend more time with "friends from the radical protest group By Any Means Necessary (BAMN) than DFT teachers" (Jacques, 2015, p. 1). Members also feel that he is less interested in the concerns of the teachers' union, and "cares more about his own agenda"; he even "protested a meeting that he should have supported" (Jacques, 2015, p. 1).

Disagreements of DFT members to Conn's style proved futile as another rally sponsored by the DFT was held at the end of May 2015 in opposition to Snyder and Earley's DPS overhaul plan (Detroit Federation of Teachers Stateweb, n.d.). The 4,000 members of the DFT were invited to urge the governor and his emergency manager to give the union control of reform, a plan which includes,

- Teacher notification of their fall placements by June 1 instead of late summer.
- A pay raise and unfrozen salary steps to attract and retain teachers.
- Lower class sizes.
- Books and supplies.
- Art, music, and phys. ed. in every school.
- More support staff such as (a) social workers, (b) hearing/speech therapists, (c) bilingual instructors, (d) librarians, (e) counselors, (f) occupational therapists, (g) physical therapists, and (h) nurses. (Detroit Federation of Teachers Stateweb, n.d.)

Just a few months later, Steven Conn was “found guilty of misconduct” and “ousted” from his position within the DFT (Lewis, 2015, p. 1).

Since this time, teachers fought for better working conditions by holding sick-outs. This physical outcry “starting in November closed dozens of schools in the state’s largest district” (The Detroit News, 2016, August 19). Lawsuits were also filed by the district and included several teachers; “all of the defendants except Conn and Conaway were dismissed from the suit” (p.1). The district viewed the sickouts as “illegal strikes under state law” and continue to seek ways to ban them (p. 1). Nonetheless, the voices of those involved in the sickouts were heard, and have the nation’s attention.

### **National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Detroit.**

Detroit’s school reform was not immune to attacks from the NAACP, either. In 2011, the NAACP was hot on the heels of educational reform in Detroit Public Schools (DPS). The organization, together with its president Reverend Wendell Anthony, contested the state’s plan of restructure to have classrooms of 62 students (PR Newswire, 2011, June 20). Anthony stated, “With 62 students in a class, teachers can’t teach and students can’t learn. It’s not education at



all, it's warehousing. And it would take us back to the days of *Brown v. Board of Education*, 'separate but unequal'" (PR Newswire, 2011, June 20). Roy Roberts, then Emergency Manager of DPS, assured the public that this would no longer happen (PR Newswire, 2011, June 20).

Reverend Anthony continued,

No honest or meaningful conversation about reform can take place without addressing the discriminatory and woefully inadequate way in which we finance public instruction in Michigan. Students in Detroit Public Schools receive 45% less funds for their education than do students in Bloomfield Hills. Michigan students have seen per pupil spending slashed year after year. The K-12 budget just passed by the State, cut our public schools, yet again, by \$470 per student, while at the same time Michigan continues to lead the nation in incarceration rates and corrections spending. The State's priorities are backwards in this state. This has to be turned around . . . Governor Rick Snyder needs to understand this very clearly: education is not a business model, and students are not commodities. (PR Newswire, 2011, June 20)

Then Vice-President Joe Biden applauded Detroit in its efforts to revamp after it faced "the nation's largest municipal bankruptcy . . . eliminating or restructuring \$7 billion in debt . . . at the 60th annual Fight for Freedom Dinner", sponsored by the NAACP Detroit chapter (Williams, 2015).

**Education Achievement Authority (EAA) of Michigan.** Further reform efforts were made by the EAA. The EAA was fully implemented during the 2012-2013 school year. Known for its efforts in states such as Tennessee and Louisiana (Zubrzycki, 2012), the EAA of Michigan "was created to turn around the academic performance of students in the state's lowest achieving schools" (EAA – Education Achievement System, n.d.). Under the EAA, students experience

longer school hours and days, and are recipients of an assessment-based learning plan, tailored to their individual learning needs and goals. Learning is self-paced, and opportunities for differentiated instruction are provided in order to obtain content mastery (EAA – Education Achievement System, n.d.).

The government-sanctioned and government-run organization that took control of 15 DPS schools (Zubrzycki, 2015) faced ridicule from Detroit’s school board as early as its first semester. The city’s attempts to separate itself from the EAA were met with opposition from the House and Senate as efforts are being made to make the state authority over DPS law (Zubrzycki, 2015).

The bill’s authors and other proponents of codifying the authority say the newly created district, which serves about 11,000 Detroit students, could potentially improve the academic achievement of the lowest-achieving five percent of schools across the entire state . . . . The Detroit school system was first taken over by the state in 1999, returned to local control in 2005, and handed to a state-appointed emergency financial manager in 2009. The lack of local control over the school system has long been a bone of contention. (Zubrzycki, 2015, pp. 1-2)

**Teach for America (TFA).** TFA is another reform effort and was birthed from a Princeton University senior student’s vision in 1989 (“Teach for America”, n.d.). Wendy Kopp had a passion to face the academic struggles of students in poverty head-on. Her vision came to fruition by placing America’s leaders on the front lines of education: the classrooms (n.d.). TFA is a program that brings college graduates, with degrees in fields other than education, into the public school system. The recruits receive five weeks of intense (and free) training in exchange for a two-year commitment to a school that serves low-income students (Chen, 2013). Built

from the ground up for more than 25 years, close to 50,000 TFA workers are currently scattered in over 50 regions across the nation, including Detroit (“Teach for America”, n.d.).

The experience Detroit’s school system currently has with TFA is not its first. TFA entered the scene in 2001 and was only in operation for just over two years before it left the city, a first, according to Kopp (Keller, 2004). Unwelcomed by teachers’ union members in the first place, TFA teachers were among the 900 educators released from their position as the district sought to right an upside-down budget and protect non-TFA teachers’ chances of maintaining or regaining their jobs (Keller, 2004). The DFT felt that the job security of non-TFA teachers was greatly threatened, while Kopp stood her ground on the premise that TFA teachers were needed in Detroit (Keller, 2004). TFA was absent from Detroit’s picture between the years of 2003 and 2010 before it returned, with millions of dollars from different foundations backing the program (“Teach for America”, 2010).

Friction remains between TFA and the teacher’s union, as those without education degrees continue to gain employment in Detroit’s classrooms. Although TFA teachers are required to obtain state teacher certification, it is not until after they have been teaching within the school system (Schultz, 2015). Keith Johnson, the President of the Detroit Federation of Teachers, claimed that TFA’s process of bringing non-certified teachers into the classroom “devalues the profession and the professionals” (Schultz, 2015, p. 1). TFA continues to move forward in Detroit as it seeks to provide an equitable education for the city’s “underserved schools” (Schultz, 2015, p. 1).

**Right to Work.** The newly enacted Right to Work Law also played a part in education. Governor Rick Snyder declared Michigan a Right to Work state in December 2012. It became a law in the spring of 2013 (Riedel, 2013). The Right to Work law “affirms the right of every

American to work for a living without being compelled to belong to a union” (Right to Work, n.d., para. 1). Its stance is neutral as far as being for or against unions in and of themselves. Its sole purpose is to protect the “individual freedom” of America’s workers (Right to Work, n.d., para.6).

Michigan’s Right to Work law has its opposition. Under the newly implemented Right to Work law of 2013, Michigan educators were given the freedom to opt out of the teachers union. This freedom did not come without strings attached, however. The month of August was the only month teachers could opt out, and this information was not disclosed to all members the union represented; the suspected reason for nondisclosure was the potential loss of funds the organization would face (Gantert, 2014). Teachers were required to provide their personal bank account numbers for automatic deductions of union dues, or pay the \$1,000 bill at the beginning of the term (Gantert, 2014).

### **Teacher Retention**

Turnover is highest among teachers than any other career, costing the educational industry billions each year (Borman & Dowling, 2006 as cited in Hughes, 2012). Teacher turnover fueled by dissatisfaction also negatively affects students’ (a) test scores, (b) attendance, and (c) discipline (Renzulli et al., 2011). In a study on teacher satisfaction and retention, researchers Renzulli et al. discovered two reasons teachers left the field: (a) racial composition or mismatch and (b) organizational structure of the schools (Renzulli et al., 2011, p. 23). Building on previous research of these two factors as separate entities, Renzulli et al. (2011) sought to study racial mismatch and organizational structure simultaneously, along with the effects on teacher retention.

Data was collected from the 1999-2000 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) and Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS) of both charter and public schools (Renzulli et al., 2011). The total sample size consisted of “32,930 teachers in 7,190 schools (31,170 traditional public school teachers in 6,740 traditional public schools, and 1,760 charter school teachers in 450 charter schools)” (Renzulli et al., 2011). This longitudinal quantitative study revealed significant differences exist between charter and public schools in reference to teacher satisfaction. Caucasian teachers were found to show less satisfaction in non-Caucasian schools than non-Caucasian teachers in public schools. However, the results pertaining to predominantly African American charter schools revealed that Caucasian teachers “are more satisfied than White traditional public school teachers when they teach in a majority Black schools” (Renzulli et al., 2011, p. 40). Of importance, it was also discovered that “teacher perception of student quality” was pivotal in the degree of teachers’ levels of satisfaction (Renzulli et al., 2011, p. 40). This factor varied across schools.

The juncture where the study on organizational structure and teacher satisfaction met revealed that this variance was affected by (a) classroom and school autonomy, (b) coworker support and school expectations, (c) attendance, (d) student quality, (e) disruption, (f) tracking, (g) job security, and (h) hours worked (Renzulli et al., 2011). With consideration of these factors, data revealed that “White teachers teaching in majority Black schools are more than five times more likely to leave teaching than are White teachers in majority White schools” (Renzulli et al., 2011, p. 41). Factors that led to this result included (a) teaching in a high school, (b) working more hours, and (c) having an advanced degree. It was also discovered that (a) socioeconomic status and (b) urban schools decreased levels of satisfaction in White teachers. Further, it was found that “charter school teachers are 2.47 times *more* likely to leave their

schools and 2.70 times *more* likely to leave teaching altogether”. In an effort to uncover the reasons charter schools had higher turnover, the authors dug deeper. They controlled for unionization and found that the lack of unions may possibly play a significant role in teacher turnover. Teacher selection was also considered; in order to avoid skewed results, the authors used “propensity score matching”, though they could not deny that selection could still play a small role in turnover (Renzulli et al., 2011, p. 41-43).

It still remains unknown whether the perception of student quality held by teachers is based on opinion or fact, both of which vary by school and teacher (Renzulli et al., 2011). A study in which teachers felt they could be completely honest in a non-threatening environment, coupled with thorough data analysis of student demographics, perceptions, behavior and academic performance would be necessary. Although this type of study is not able to completely reveal the true reasons behind teacher satisfaction and turnover, it would shed more light on the research that has already been conducted. A similar study on elementary and high school teachers as separate entities was suggested. It was also suggested that future research on this scale use an objective approach by removing the personal views of teachers and their perceptions. Finally, it is worth finding whether or not the findings in this study resonate with teachers who left the urban setting in metropolitan Detroit, and whether or not the economic collapse of 2009 had anything to do with their decisions to leave (Renzulli et al., 2011).

Ronfeldt, Loeb and Wyckoff (2013) contend that varying factors related to teacher turnover can either positively or negatively affect student achievement; not all cases of turnover harm student success. For example, as teachers leave, some replacements may be better matched for the position and provide fresh concepts (Abelson & Baysinger, 1984 as cited in Ronfeldt, Loeb and Wyckoff, 2013, p. 5). This effect was referred to as “compositional” and can be

positive or negative (2013, p. 5). In the instance of better suited replacements, the compositional effect was positive. If the teacher who left was more effective than the replacement teacher, the compositional effect was negative (p. 5).

In addition to compositional effects, the researchers discussed “disruptive” effects of teacher turnover on student achievement (Ronfeldt, Loeb and Wyckoff, 2013, p. 7). It was noted that both intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships among staff members change with each turnover. The effects of such changes vary in degree based on the strength of such relationships. “To the degree that turnover disrupts the formation and maintenance of staff cohesion and community, it may also affect student achievement” (2013, p. 7). When teachers leave, they also take “knowledge important to the effective implementation” of curriculum (Abselon & Baysinger, 1984 as cited in Ronfeldt, Loeb and Wyckoff, 2013, p. 7). New teachers unfamiliar with the school’s curriculum require training, which adversely affects quality time spent on student instruction, and subsequent student achievement (Ronfeldt, Loeb and Wyckoff, 2013, p. 7).

Ronfeldt, Loeb and Wyckoff (2013) conducted an extensive literature review to determine if any cause-and-effect relationships were found between teacher turnover and student achievement. However, Ronfeldt, Loeb and Wyckoff (2013) were dissatisfied with the results. The researchers found that prior studies which linked teacher turnover to student achievement were only correlational. The researchers also contended that a correlational view of the relationship between teacher turnover and student achievement did not necessarily mean that teacher turnover causes lower student achievement. The researchers stated that “low achievement may also cause teachers to leave” (2013). Ronfeldt, Loeb and Wyckoff (2013) thus sought a cause-and-effect relationship between teacher turnover and student achievement (p. 8).

It was suggested that “a third factor (e.g., poverty, working conditions, or poor school leadership) may simultaneously cause both low achievement and higher turnover” (Ronfeldt, Loeb and Wyckoff, 2013, p. 5). After a precursory determination that a cause-and-effect relationship between teacher turnover and student achievement existed, Ronfeldt, Loeb and Wyckoff (2013) sought to answer three research questions that pertained to (a) average effect of teacher turnover on student achievement, (b) if effects are different for different kinds of schools and (c) explanations of the relationships between teacher turnover and student achievement, i.e., compositional or disruptive (Ronfeldt, Loeb and Wyckoff, 2013, p. 9). Data of over three-quarters of a million fourth- and fifth-grade student observations were analyzed. This quantitative study placed eight non-consecutive school years of New York City schools under the microscope. Factors such as rate of teacher turnover, student populace student attrition and test scores were included (2013, p. 9). Results indicated that “the negative effect of teacher turnover on student achievement was larger in schools with higher proportions of low achieving and Black students” (p. 25). Results also indicated that “the turnover effect is negative and significant in lower-achieving schools but that there is no significant effect in higher-achieving schools” (p. 28).

“Recruiting and retaining good teachers should be one of the most important agendas for our nation” (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 17). Darling-Hammond (2010) cited several studies in which teacher effectiveness greatly contributed toward higher student achievement. Thus, she encouraged the development of “more effective policies to attract, retain, and support the continued learning of well-prepared and committed teachers” (pp. 17-18). In addition, Darling-Hammond (2010) urged policymakers to apprehend reasons behind teachers’ decisions to leave high-needs schools, as an understanding would help “develop effective strategies for keeping



their best teachers” (p. 18). Darling-Hammond (2010) identified key elements that can not only attract, but can retain teachers in high-needs schools: “a) salaries, b) working conditions, c) preparation, and d) mentoring and support” (p. 20).

### **Necessary Characteristics of Urban School Teachers**

In one of her books on how to properly view and teach students in urban academia, author, educator, and activist Lisa Delpit highlighted factors teachers should not ignore. Delpit argued that achievement gaps do not exist at birth, but come to pass as a result of poor teaching (Delpit, 2012, p. 5). She stated,

the achievement gap should not be considered the gap between black children’s performance and white children’s performance—the latter of which can be considered only mediocre on an international scale—but rather between black children’s performance and these same children’s exponentially greater potential (Delpit, 2012, p. 5).

Delpit further challenged the oft-used theory of “culture of poverty” that excuses students for any academic deficits (p. 6). She purported that viewing students through this lens supplies them with an automatic crutch that is not needed. Rather, teachers should challenge students with complex and challenging instruction (p. 8).

**Teacher-student relationships.** Several characteristics of teachers were found to have a positive effect on urban education. One such characteristic is that of teacher-student relationships. Built off of decades of research on the effects of trust in schools, Adams (2014) expanded the arena to include the level of collective trust students had in their teachers, and the subsequent effects on (a) positive student beliefs, (b) behaviors, and (c) achievement outcomes in reading and math. Collective trust is formed when students observe positive behaviors of their

teachers, and share such observations with their peers. As child-adult relationships can be volatile within the urban culture, teachers have an increasing role of importance in terms of building trust among students. When students trust, their needs are met. Subsequently, “satisfying these needs in students can unlock their potential to achieve future goals and dreams (Adams, 2014, p. 140).

This quantitative study sought to discover the effects collective student trust had on the areas of (a) school identification, (b) self-regulated learning, and (c) math and reading achievement (Adams, 2014). Student surveys were collected from 1,646 elementary students representing 56 elementary schools in a southern urban school district. Among schools represented in this study, some were part of a free-reduced lunch (FRL) programs, while others were not. Results confirmed the hypotheses that collective student trust would positively impact areas of (a) school identification, (b) self-regulated learning, and (c) math and reading achievement (Adams, 2014).

In fact, the study revealed that “collective trust was the strongest school-level antecedent of (a) positive student beliefs, (b) behavior, and (c) achievement (Adams, 2014, p. 150). Further, “FRL students in high-trust schools outperformed their comparable peers in low-trust schools and performed only slightly below non-FRL students in low-trust schools” (Adams, 2014, p. 151). Limitations were discussed and served as suggestions for future research. Proposed future studies included (a) studying schools outside of one district, as well as the inclusion of middle schools and high schools with different demographics (b) control for prior achievement at the individual and school levels, and (c) conducting a longitudinal study (Adams, 2014).

**Teacher expectations.** Student achievement also finds a link to teacher expectations (Rubie-Davies, 2010). In her quantitative study of elementary school teachers, Rubie-Davies

(2010) analyzed data of 24 teacher questionnaires that pertained to the expectations they held for students. The study was birthed from prior studies, including that which was conducted by Brophy and Good (1970) on teacher expectations and self-fulfilling prophecy (Rubie-Davies, 2010). The difference between prior studies and this was that teacher expectations were studied at a class level, rather than individual (Rubie-Davies, 2010). Results indicated that teachers who have high expectations for their students versus teachers with low expectations can both perceive the characteristics of students in a positive manner, yet yield different results in terms of student achievement.

The differences were found in views of students': (a) perseverance, (b) independence, (c) reaction to new work, (d) interest in new work, (e) interest in schoolwork, (f) participation in class, (g) motivation, (h) confidence, (i) self-esteem, (j) classroom behavior, (k) peer relationship, (l) parent attitudes to school, (m) home environment, and (n) homework completion. Though low-expectation teachers perceive their students in a positive light, high-expectation teachers rated their students higher in these categories. The correlation between teacher perceptions of student engagement and teachers' expectations was strong in contrast to low-expectation teachers. Low expectation teachers perceived that student achievement was related to student engagement with the task, whereas the more successful students had the teachers who had high expectations and viewed student attributes positively (Rubie-Davies, 2010, p. 129).

While this study contributed positive knowledge to the field of teacher expectations and student achievement, it was limited in scope by the number of participants that were included. A future study which involves more participants across more districts would be beneficial. Demographics should also be broadened to include both suburban and urban schools. A future

study focused on middle and high school teachers is also appropriate. The author noted that a future study should investigate teacher expectations from a teacher's standpoint, "rather than student-focused scenarios" (Rubie-Davies, 2010).

**Personal epistemology.** Individuals hold a personal epistemology, "one's view of reality and justifications for those views" (Pearrow & Sanchez, 2007, p. 227). These views of reality fall on a spectrum between that of logical positivist and social construction (Unger, Draper, & Pendergrass, 1986 as cited in Pearrow & Sanchez, 2007, p. 227). Logical positivists hold to the belief that reality is "relatively fixed, objectively accessible, and replicable across contexts...and generally accept the status quo" (Pearrow & Sanchez, 2007, p. 227). Social constructionism views reality as changeable and largely a matter of cultural and historical definition (Unger et al., 1986 as cited in Pearrow & Sanchez, 2007). There is also the belief that power is imparted by society and that differences between groups can be better explained by environmental factors than by biological ones (Worrell, Stilwell, Oakley, & Robinson, 1999 as cited in Pearrow & Sanchez, 2007, p. 227).

Through their research, Pearrow & Sanchez (2007) found suggestions of demographic influence on teachers' epistemologies. It appeared that the higher the level of education an individual had obtained, the more likely they were willing to challenge the status quo, thus holding a social constructionist view. However, this held true mostly for females, as males displayed an inclination toward the logical positivist view. Since the population of teachers is predominantly female, the researchers wanted to see which stance was predominant, and how they brought that view into urban education. As students in urban schools tend to face greater challenges, it was questioned whether the epistemological view of teachers negatively impacted their interaction with urban students. That is, views "may limit the willingness of

urban...teachers to become involved in abstract activities in which the learning of content material is not immediately evident or easy to assess” (Pearrow & Sanchez, 2007, p. 227-228).

This quantitative analysis studied 73 teachers, mostly Caucasian females, in urban elementary schools from a New England state. Data from self-reported questionnaires and demographics was collected and analyzed. More than 80% of the participants held Master’s degrees or higher, but the possibility of higher education as a mandate rather than a personal choice was considered (Pearrow & Sanchez, 2007). The questionnaire sought to ascertain participants’ views on (a) individual determinism, (b) societal determinism, and (c) variable determinism. Individual determinism holds “the view that individuals are capable of striving and achieving success if they work hard”. Societal determinism is “the view that society and its rules are inherently legitimate and that external authority and biological differences are accepted as given”. Variable determinism views “individual and societal outcomes” as “uncontrollable” (Pearrow & Sanchez, 2007, p. 233).

Results indicated that emphasis was placed on individual determinism more than societal or variable determinism, and that the participants held tighter to the view of logical positivist rather than social constructionist (Pearrow & Sanchez, 2007). The results were inconsistent, as logical positivists do not generally tout individual determinism. Limitations were noted that (a) “urban teachers’ beliefs regarding violence prevention and intervention within the school setting” was a topic in the questionnaire, and may have influenced responses; (b) the quantitative measure may have been weak, (c) the sample size was too small, and (d) the results may or may not be generalizable to teachers of older grades and teachers in public school settings. Suggestions for future research included (a) qualitative, not just quantitative studies; (b) broadening the study to encompass elementary teachers in all settings, thus enlarging the sample

size and providing a diverse backdrop; (c) expanding to include other school personnel, and (d) studying teacher attrition in urban schools despite the views presented by this study's participants (Pearrow & Sanchez, 2007).

**Culturally responsive teaching and effective classroom management.** Culturally responsive teaching, or culturally responsive pedagogy, is another hot topic in the arena of urban education. Defined, culturally responsive teaching is the act of “purposely responding to the needs of the many culturally and ethnically diverse learners in classrooms” (Brown, 2004, p. 268). “Gaining students’ cooperation in urban classrooms involves establishing a classroom atmosphere in which teachers are aware of and address students’ cultural and ethnic needs as well as their social emotional and cognitive needs” (Brown, 2004, p. 267). Brown (2004) identified four main characteristics of effective culturally responsive classroom management within an urban setting (a) a caring attitude, (b) an establishment of assertiveness and authority, (c) an establishment of congruent communication processes, and (d) a demand for effort. Brown (2004) conducted a qualitative study to identify links between teachers’ professed methods of classroom management and culturally responsive teaching within urban schools.

Thirteen teachers in urban schools were interviewed in this study, and represented grades one through 12 across seven United States cities including (a) Philadelphia, (b) New York, (c) Chicago, (d) Los Angeles, (e) San Francisco, (f) Minneapolis, and (g) Wichita (Brown, 2004). Participant selection was made based on a reputation of effective teaching. Participants represented several races including (a) Sri Lankan, (b) African American, (c) Hispanic American, and (d) Caucasian. The majority of participants were Caucasian. Teaching experience was a little as two years to as large as 33 years. Students of the participants

represented ethnicities of (a) African, (b) Hispanic, (c) Native, (d) Asian American, and (e) a wide variety of recent immigrant and refugee students (Brown, 2008).

Interviews were conducted then transcribed and coded for themes. Thirty-four questions pertaining to classroom management were asked. Five major themes emerged from the data analysis (a) developing personal relationships and mutual respect through individualized attention, (b) creating caring learning communities, (c) establishing business-like learning environments, (d) establishing congruent communication processes, and (e) teaching with assertiveness and clearly stated expectations (Brown, 2004). Thus, one can conclude that a relationship was found between classroom management styles of the participants and culturally responsive teaching.

Limitations included the non-generalizability of the study's findings (Brown, 2004). Another limitation is that Detroit teachers were not included in this study. Suggestions for future research could include a replicative study in Detroit's urban schools. A quantitative study could be conducted on the link between effective classroom management and culturally responsive teaching on urban students' academic achievement. The author noted that evidence lacked by way of teacher preparation programs or teacher in-services having the ability to teach culturally responsive teaching (Brown, 2004).

"Most teachers are from backgrounds that are different from those of their students, and most have little experience or knowledge about their students" (Burstein et al., 2009, p. 25). The Caucasian race still dominates the teaching force (Goldenberg, 2014). Caucasian teachers need to recognize the culture of non-Caucasian students in order to close the achievement gap. Students of color need the same opportunities to learn (by teachers recognizing and incorporating

their culture), in order to succeed in the academic world as their White counterparts (Goldenberg, 2014).

Teachers must cultivate an awareness of the types of cultural capital that students of color bring to the classroom, as well as develop a culture-specific pedagogy. When Caucasian teachers of the dominant culture bridge the opportunity gap, engagement of non-Caucasian students will increase, and thus, student achievement will also increase (Goldenberg, 2014). Yosso (2005) depicted six kinds of cultural capital held by urban students: (a) aspirational, (b) linguistic, (c) familial, (d) social, (e) navigational, and (f) resistant. A Caucasian teacher is not automatically inept at teaching students of color. Nor is a student of color automatically unable to learn. Rather, the teacher must possess or acquire the ability to incorporate the cultural capital of urban students in order to bridge the achievement gap (Goldenberg, 2014).

Siwatu (2011) suggested that ways to prepare prospective teachers for the urban contexts need identified as well as an identification of the components of a structured system that supports new teachers as they face new challenges within the urban context. Gay (2010) noted that distinguished multicultural teachers were adept in “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, 2010, p. 31). Randall (2010) found that teachers of urban students need to provide opportunities for student-led lessons, specifically relating to their culture, as well as “frequent positive feedback” (Randall, 2010, p. 60).

LaDuke (2009) approached culturally responsive teaching from a different angle: resistance. He sought to examine the factors leading to cognitive dissonance and subsequent resistance toward diverse educational settings with regard to race when exposed to multicultural



content through coursework. LaDuke (2009) found that pre-service teachers indicated high levels of resistance. They acknowledged that racism and discrimination existed, but they were not willing to accept the concept that they could change their views and have an effective stance in the educational sector. He proposed that the pre-service teachers felt their beliefs were directly related with their identity, and a challenge to those beliefs would prove inconvenient (LaDuke, 2009, p. 39).

**Resiliency.** Amidst the vast amount of studies that investigate why teachers leave, a group of researchers investigated why some urban teachers stay. Yonezawa, Jones, and Singer (2011), conducted six case studies of teachers from “urban, high-poverty schools” and their professional resilience. For the purpose of this study, the researchers defined resiliency “as a dynamic construct that emerges within the interplay between individuals’ strengths and self-efficacy and social environments in which they live and work” (Yonezawa et al., 2011, p. 916). In this qualitative, case-study format, the researchers sought to identify contributors to staying power in a normally high-needs, high-turnover environment, i.e., urban schools.

Yonezawa et al. (2011) were part of a larger study of 160 teachers nationwide connected to the National Writing Project (NWP), a national and international summer program where teachers can collaborate on the subject of writing, both for personal gain and to enhance pedagogical practices. Educators had attributed the NWP’s role as a strong contributor toward their resiliency. Similar comments from the 160 interviews gave credit to the NWP as having “played an important role in shaping their career trajectories”. In fact, “many teachers believed that they would have left teaching for new professions without the intellectual infusion that their work with the Writing Project provided them”. Thus, this smaller group of researchers focused on the link between the NWP and teacher resiliency (Yonezawa et al., 2011, p. 917, 919).

Identification of a subset of participants who had at least five years teaching experience in high-poverty, urban schools and expressed resiliency were selected (Yonezawa et al., 2011). Next, an affiliation with the NWP was required. From there, six educators were selected for in-depth case studies. The participants represented schools in Chicago, Oakland, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and Boston. Each subject, five females and one male, was over the age of 50 and, combined, had over 200 years of teaching experience in urban, high-poverty schools. Of the six participants, five were Caucasian and one African-American. Two had taught in a K-8 setting, and the others, High School. The subjects had more than a decade of experience, and had not considered leaving the profession. Rather, they identified ways in which the NWP enhanced their career (Yonezawa et al., 2011).

Telephone interviews of 90-minutes to two-hours were conducted to identify influencers on resiliency, and thus, retention (Yonezawa et al., 2011). Interviews were then transcribed, coded, and analyzed for themes. Results indicated that participation with the NWP positively contributed to the areas of (a) technical information, (b) cultural support, and (c) participants' development of individual agency and leadership over time. The researchers found that teachers, no matter the years of experience they hold, need to be (a) supported by professional communities of colleagues, (b) immersed in reflective intellectual inquiry into their practice, and (c) given opportunities for leadership development within their professional contexts (Yonezawa et al., 2011).

A limitation to this study was that it was only conducted during one academic school year. Although it included teachers representing high-poverty schools in several regions, it focused on one program. However, the authors suggested that the NWP, or a program similar in nature, could serve as a model for other high-poverty schools seeking to build teacher resiliency

(Yonezawa et al., 2011, p. 926). Suggestions for future research would include conducting a study on teachers' experiences with the NWP and resiliency using more recent data. Future studies could also include replication of Yonezawa et al. (2011) study with programs similar in nature to the NWP.

### **Challenges Faced by Urban School Teachers**

Urban schools consistently perform lower academically than their suburban counterparts (Hochbein, Mitchell, & Pollio, 2013, p. 270). In an effort to ensure all students received an equal education, NCLB (2001) was enacted to hold teachers accountable for student achievement. Through standardized and high-stakes testing, schools are held accountable for student performance. For teachers in the urban elementary setting, the requirements set forth by NCLB could have consequences far worse than those suburban schools face. Educational policymakers determined that the best means of raising student achievement in high-poverty, urban schools, was to measure AYP (Hochbein et al., 2013, p. 270).

**Standards-based reform.** Though the impetus behind NCLB was to increase teacher quality and effectiveness in order to yield better academic results among students, the initiative came with a high price: poor performance on tests could cost teachers their careers. Further, the pendulum of instruction made a dramatic shift from “genuine instruction” (Desimone, 2013, p. 59) toward that of “test preparation”. Albeit the discussions to bridge the achievement gap among urban students and their Caucasian counterparts, NCLB seems to have left behind the most important aspect of each child, the qualities that make them human. Rendering useless the lived experiences of those on the front lines of standardized tests, NCLB only requires an analysis of numbers (Carey, 2014, p. 446).

Race to the Top (RTTT) was set in motion by Arne Duncan, Secretary of Education under then United States President, Barack Obama (2012) and is a program designed to raise student achievement. Prior to RTTT, schools received monies based on “demographics or educational need” (McGuinn, 2014, p. 62), whereas RTTT distributes monetary support to performing schools. Specifically, schools are only considered for support if they “have strong track records and plans for innovation and can demonstrate key stakeholder commitment to reform” (p. 62). Though some question the manner in which the RTTT reform policy was established, there is growing evidence that administrators and teachers are paying closer attention to pedagogical practices. The biggest characteristic of RTTT is its competitive nature. The bottom line: schools that do not perform do not receive funds. Although schools are showing response, there is still a limit of \$4.35 billion that was allocated. This means that not all schools that perform will get money, and those that do will not receive the same amount. Teachers and students in low-performing schools are ultimately affected as they will not receive necessary funds (McGuinn, 2014).

The inception of the CCSS altered the basis of the learning standards. Michigan is one of the 40 + states to adopt the CCSS that places a heavy emphasis on English Language Arts and Mathematics proficiency (Klotz, 2012, p. 25). Schultz, Jones-Walker, & Chikkatur (2008) found that the new common core curriculum left little room for listening to the lives of children and building knowledge based on their interests. The standardized curriculum in this school and others that have adopted the common core appears to have a “one size fits all” approach (Schultz et al., 2008, p. 181).

Although the premise standards-based reform is to close the gap, the question remains, “Is it enough?” Desimone (2013) tackled the question that is asked by many. When a teacher is

in a high-poverty school, other variables can affect the execution of implementing standards-based instruction (a) prior knowledge of the students, (b) socioeconomic status, (c) life experiences that accompany the student, (d) attendance, and (e) parental involvement. If any of these are out of place, the students will struggle more and the teacher will have a harder time bridging that gap.

The multi-state study of high-poverty schools involved interviews and their analyses of teachers, administrators at the school and district level, and state officials. Results yielded four major themes with regard to the effects of standards-based reform: (a) attention to struggling learners, (b) teaching to the test, (c) responsibility for student learning, and (d) classroom content and pedagogy (Desimone, 2013). The positive changes experienced by participants indicate that teachers are more aware of struggling students and try to ensure that no child slips through the cracks. District leaders noted a positive change in teacher expectations based on test accountability. Since teachers spent more time preparing all students for a test, scores indicated learning took place. Teachers began to unlink the connection they had made between economics and learning capability (Desimone, 2013).

In addition, participants reported feelings of accountability for all students since the inception of standards-based reform (Desimone, 2013). However, though high-stakes tests did in fact reap positive rewards, participants still expressed levels of concern over the amount of tests, student stress when facing the tests, and lack of motivation to learn on the part of the students when testing ended (Desimone, 2013). With regard to classroom content and pedagogy, participants acknowledged that while teachers were told what to teach, they had the freedom to teach in a manner they saw fit. However, participants also agreed that the manner of instruction

was changing, too, from a traditional to a constructivist approach, in order to accommodate the required standards of learning (Desimone, 2013).

Desimone (2013) included several limitations to the study (a) lack of analysis on possible effects principal and district actions have on teachers, (b) possible unintended consequences for low-achieving, underserved students, (c) no evidence of behavior change, and (d) a sole focus on mathematics. Despite its limitations, the study did uncover “incredible consistency across districts, schools, and states” with regard to the importance of prioritizing an effective education for all students, which included struggling learners. Future studies would need to be conducted on teaching practices, teacher beliefs, and the latest in standards-based reform, RTTT (Desimone, 2013, p. 44).

**Special education and disproportional representation.** Another challenge facing teachers of urban education is the area of special education. Students within the urban sector are more likely to be identified as needing special education services than their suburban counterparts. This decades old problem has yet to receive a solution (Bal, Sullivan, & Harper, 2013; Feldman, 2011; Shealey & Blanchett, 2009). Students who represent the urban culture face obstacles of (a) poverty, (b) lack of school success, (c) single-parent families, and (d) limited English proficiency (Morse, 2001). An addition of a special education label only exacerbates the situation. Traits common to urban special education students include (a) disproportionate representation, (b) segregated special education classes rather than inclusion, (c) absence of culturally responsive teaching, and (d) a lack of qualified special education teachers (Shealey & Blanchett, 2009).

A 2006 New York study of urban students in special education also discovered that asthma was a health concern among this populace (Stingone & Claudio, 2006). Students with

asthma are recorded as having high rates of absenteeism, which leads to insufficient exposure to academic instruction. Students with asthma were represented the most in full-time special education classes, with part-time special education students ranking second, and general education students the lowest amount of students diagnosed with asthma. Low income was also found to play a role in urban students with asthma and their placement in special education classes (Stingone & Claudio, 2006).

If teachers are not fully equipped to meet the needs of urban special education students, the student dropout rate will continue to increase as teachers either leave the urban setting or continue to teach with ineffective methods and a lack of proper curricular resources (McIntyre, 2002; Morse, 2001). Students who are transient in school (non-cohort) are more difficult to track in terms of academic progress and needs. Schools that do not track students, cohort or non-cohort, are more likely to allow students with special needs to fall through the cracks of the system.

Although data suggests that both urban and suburban schools service a similar percentage of special education students with closely similar disabilities, suburban students are not as likely to experience hardships such as (a) poverty with income less than \$12,000, (b) high percentages of single-parent families, and (c) parents that do not have a high school diploma (Morse, 2001). Nonetheless, the dropout rates of special education students almost reached 50%. It was suggested that the scarcity of special education teachers in the urban setting contributed heavily to this data (Morse, 2001). Urban students with special needs are less likely to further their education upon graduation. If they do graduate from high school, low percentages of urban individuals with special needs are likely to seek employment (Morse, 2001).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 (IDEA) specifies how students who receive special education should receive instruction (Morse, 2001). Terms such as (a) least-restrictive environment, (b) mainstreaming and (c) inclusion fill the annals of special education terminology. Educators worked feverishly to adjust general education curricula to suit the needs of students requiring special education services. However, many argued that a watered-down general education curriculum is not what special education students require. Rather, special education students ought to receive instruction specific to their needs, and instruction that will prepare them for the adult world. Further, urban students representative in the special education setting experience particular adversities not commonly shared by their Caucasian counterparts (Morse, 2001).

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 (IDEA), inclusion was put in place to rectify the separation of special education students from their general education counterparts. While positive changes were made in the area of special education, loopholes under IDEA were found as urban students may not receive the instruction in a general education classroom that is fitting to their needs. Further, general education teachers may not possess the skills necessary to educate these students in the manner with which they require (Morse, 2001). In fact, African American students who receive special education services represent the highest percentage of students that spend the least amount of time in a general education setting (Shealey & Blanchett, 2009). Disproportionality may be partly to blame.

Oswald, Coutinho, Best, & Singh (1999) defined special education disproportionality is “the extent to which membership is given . . . the group affects the probability of being placed in a specific special education disability category” (as cited in Bal et al., 2014, p. 3). Such identification includes not only (a) race, (b) class, and (c) ability, but (d) perceptions and



behaviors of educators, (e) quality of educational opportunities, and (f) school culture. Thus, students who are determined to require special education may not necessarily need such special services after all. Consequently, due to the limit of students a special education teacher can have in their caseload, students who indeed qualify for special education may not receive the services due them (Bal et al., 2014).

In an effort to reduce the amount of special education referrals, federal funding now provides services for early intervention (Oswald et al., 1999). However, disproportionality remains as school personnel continue to allow perceived reality rather than actual student needs influence eligibility and selection (Bal et al., 2014). The problems are exacerbated for both urban special education students and their teachers as they deal with (a) low achievement, (b) suspensions and expulsions, (c) school dropout, and (d) insufficient parental involvement (Cannon, Gregory, & Waterstone, 2013). The absence of any of these components disarms the sole ability of IDEA to educate students. Cannon et al. (2013) also found that when IDEA is implemented fully as intended, urban students experience a positive change in academic achievement. The challenges of (a) low achievement, (b) suspensions and expulsions, (c) school dropout, (d) involvement in the juvenile justice system, and (e) psychiatric hospitalization and residential treatment can be avoided when IDEA is enacted in its entirety (Cannon et al., 2013).

**Parental involvement.** When discussions that pertain to the education of minors is present, the topic of parental involvement cannot be ignored. A meta-analysis was conducted by Jeynes (2005) to uncover the influence, if any, of parental involvement on the academic achievement of urban elementary students. Jeynes' (2005) efforts were made in order to fill a gap in research on the effects of specific types of parental involvement on the academic achievement of urban students. Four areas were analyzed (a) the degree parental involvement is

associated with higher levels of school achievement among urban students, (b) the positive influence, if any, that school programs of parental involvement have on urban students, (c) the aspects of parental involvement that help urban students the most, and (d) whether the relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement holds across race and gender groups.

Data collected for this study commenced with an exhaustive search of the social science databases, which yielded 5,000 articles that pertained to parental involvement. Since Jeynes (2005) looked for quantitative material, the number decreased to 50. Only 41 studies were finally selected based on the amount of quantitative data needed for the meta-analysis (Jeynes, 2005). Methods used for reliability and validity included coding and interrater reliability of data that consisted of more than 20,000 participants. Defined, parental involvement was considered “parental participation in the educational processes and experiences of their children”. To variables under the umbrella of parental involvement that were (a) general parental involvement, (b) specific parental involvement, (c) communication, (d) homework, (e) parental expectations, (f) reading, (g) attendance and participation, and (h) parental style (Jeynes, 2005, pp. 245-6).

Results indicated that overall there was a significant relationship between parental involvement and student achievement among urban elementary school students (Jeynes, 2005). A significant relationship was also found between parental programs and student achievement. Specific aspects of parental involvement that helped urban students the most included (a) parental expectations, (b) parental reading, (c) checking homework and (d) parental style (Jeynes, 2005). Finally, no statistically significant differences existed between parental involvement and race or parental involvement and gender (Jeynes, 2005).

Two limitations were discussed. First, a meta-analysis does not include new research. Second, the research questions included in the meta-analysis were selected because they were included in the existing research; new questions could not be included (Jeynes, 2005). A third limitation, not mentioned, is the timeframe in which this research was conducted, and the lack of current research on the topic. Suggestions for future studies included: (a) an examination as to why certain aspects of parental involvement, particularly those that involve creating an educationally oriented atmosphere, are more noteworthy than others; (b) why parental involvement strongly influences the achievement of minority children in particular; (c) a study that incorporates sophisticated statistical techniques, such as randomization and the use of hierarchical linear modeling; (d) studies to determine which parental involvement programs work best and why; and (e) qualitative research to supplement the findings of the current study by ascertaining the ways that teachers, parents, and students perceive that parental involvement benefits students the most (Jeynes, 2005). A replication of the study at the middle and high school levels are also warranted.

**Teacher preparation programs and self-efficacy.** Gaining signal strength on the radar screen is the subject of teacher preparatory programs, specifically, teacher preparatory programs for urban education (Harris & Sass, 2011; Leland & Murtadha, 2011; Matsko & Hammerness, 2014; Ronfeldt et al., 2013; Waddell & Ukpokodu, 2012; Watson, 2011). As pre-service teachers prepare to enter urban classrooms, it is necessary for teacher education programs to instruct them on the culture of urban students. Teacher candidates tend to feel less prepared to teach in an urban than suburban setting, and also experience significantly lower feelings of self-efficacy to implement culturally relevant pedagogy in an urban rather than suburban setting (Siwatu, 2011). “Educators argue that rather than move toward alternative preparation programs,

conventional university programs need to restructure to improve the recruitment, preparation, and retention of teachers” (Watson, 2011, p. 25).

Teacher education programs focus on the successful preparation of pre-service teachers. Assaf et al. (2010) studied the beliefs toward multicultural education of teachers in charge of preparing such pre-service teachers. In this qualitative, grounded theory study, the researchers believed that the attitudes and beliefs of teacher candidates toward multicultural education are important. They purported that before teacher candidates’ beliefs can be affected, an examination of the beliefs of those who teach the candidates is necessary with the goal of a coherent teacher education program at the forefront. The subjects included 14 teacher educators of undergraduate teacher education programs at a large southwestern university. Nine were full-time tenure track or tenured and have an average work experience in the field of four years. The remaining five teacher educators are full-time adjunct faculty and have an average work experience of seven years. Eleven teacher educators were Caucasian, middle class females, aged 30-55 years; two were Mexican-American females; two were Caucasian, middle class males aged 40-55; three spoke Spanish fluently (Assaf et al., 2010).

Interviews of the participants were conducted. Artifacts of (a) course syllabi, (b) schedules of topics, as well as (c) quizzes, exams and other assessments were collected. Member checks of transcribed interviews were conducted for reliability. Summaries were written and discussions held over the themes that emerged for inter-coder reliability. Four themes emerged from the study (a) balancing optimistic perspectives of diversity while facing challenges, (b) authentic experiences with diverse students, (c) universal methods of ideological understandings and (d) ethnic and linguistic differences: outsider or insider stances. While the teacher educators held differing beliefs and attitudes toward multicultural education, they all believed that teacher

candidates would benefit from field experiences in a cultural setting different their own (Assaf et al., 2010).

Constant comparative analysis was used to analyze the data. Summaries were written and discussions were held to ensure inter-coder reliability. Teacher educators held differing beliefs and attitudes toward teacher education, but the researchers did not believe that a coherent program meant that everyone should think in the same manner. Rather, teacher educators in a school program should have the same goals, continually examined through self-reflection, to move toward the purpose of preparing teacher candidates for a multicultural setting (Assaf et al., 2010).

Limitations were discussed. Some teachers had more experience in the field of multiculturalism than others. Teachers had varying educational backgrounds which could also affect beliefs and attitudes. The role of professional development on beliefs and attitudes was not examined. The study was conducted at different schools. The authors suggested the following for further research (a) consider the experiences teachers bring to the field, (b) consider the educational background of each teacher, (c) consider the role professional development plays on beliefs and attitudes and (d) conduct the study within a local school (Assaf et al., 2010).

**School culture.** Characteristics that comprise the school's environment can also impact teachers' workplace perceptions. In a study on workplace conditions, Kukla-Acevedo (2009) discussed how a school's culture can either increase teachers' sense of purpose or drastically dampen it, thus influencing their decisions to stay or leave. Using prior studies as a basis, Kukla-Acevedo (2009) placed the potential influential components of (a) behavioral climate, (b) administrative support and (c) classroom autonomy under the microscope. This quantitative

study compared the effects of school culture on both experienced and novice teachers. Data was collected from two subsets from the National Center for Educational Statistics, one set from 1999-2000 and the other 2000-2001.

Results indicated that novice teachers with less than five years of experience were almost twice as likely to leave teaching and more than twice as likely to switch schools as teachers with more than five years of experience (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009, p. 446). Age of the teachers and salary also showed correlations with leaving the field or switching schools, respectively, however, men were more likely to stay than women. Teachers in their first year displayed the highest amount of turnover. Therefore, the effects of workplace conditions including (a) administrative support, (b) behavioral climate, and (c) classroom control were studied for causes of teacher turnover among this group of teachers. Results of this quantitative study indicated a significant relationship between behavioral climate and teacher turnover of first-year teachers in urban schools. However, teachers of science and mathematics had higher retention rates. Administrative support increased the likelihood of teacher retention, unless the teachers were in their first-year, in which the rate of turnover increased. No significant relationship was found between classroom autonomy and teacher turnover Kukla-Acevedo (2009).

Valuable information was added to the field of turnover with regard to the differences between novice and experienced teachers. Specifically, the effect of student behavior on first-year teacher turnover gives insight to all involved. Limitations were discussed. One such limitation was that the data was not longitudinal (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009). Therefore, as the author pointed out, it was “impossible to explore the trends in turnover” (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009, p. 451). Suggestions for future research included (a) a discovery of whether or not those who left the profession ever returned to teaching, (b) extending the study to determine whether the

decision to move to different schools increased the likelihood of moving again or staying. It was also suggested that the effects of stress on turnover be studied. Since the study was quantitative in nature, the researcher was unable to dig deeper into understanding why the variables caused novice teachers to leave the field (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009).

### **Veteran and Retired Teachers Speak Out**

A discussion on teacher retention would not be replete without the view from veteran and retired teachers. Martinez, Frick, Kim, and Fried (2010) interviewed participants on the following criteria (a) professional development opportunities, (b) positive work conditions and supports, (c) deliberate role design and deliberation, (d) responsive induction programs that assist teachers during their first two years, (e) mentoring programs for new teachers, (f) opportunities to observe model teachers, (g) programs that foster the development of resiliency, (h) cooperative spirit among colleagues, (i) problem solving/coping/stress skills, (j) rewards and advancements, (k) outlets for frustration, (l) reasonable time schedules, (m) empowerment, and (n) higher salary; bonuses (Martinez et al., 2010). In addition to interviews, teachers discussed their findings with volunteers from Experience Corps in their classrooms; those interviewed indicated an increase in their desire to remain teaching in the school due to an additional person in the room. Additional benefits of Experience Corps volunteers in the urban classrooms included (a) improved teacher effort, (b) reduced rate of absences on the part of the teacher, and (c) focused attention on students (Martinez et al., 2010).

### **Summary**

Teachers are not always adept to teach in an urban environment (Celik & Amaz, 2012). The majority of teaching positions reside within the urban sector, yet teachers' education classes typically prepare them for a suburban setting (Randall, 2010). Aside from the general

components that comprise a teacher's daily duties, interpersonal skills for relating to students of another culture are not generally taught. Novice teachers who lack this knowledge or training will have an increased difficulty in reaching students' needs and may subsequently find themselves leaving the urban setting altogether (Randall, 2010).

Novice teachers in an urban setting will not have the time that is necessary to build an effective pedagogy if they leave within the first five years. This revolving door syndrome negatively impacts the learning outcomes of students. Coupled with the economic challenges in Detroit and the accompanying personal struggles urban students face, teacher turnover may appear to increase the insurmountable odds Detroit children face. The sinkhole of urban education known as the achievement gap will continue to permeate the lives of both present and future generations.

As African-Americans shift from among a cultural minority to a majority, educators must make the paradigmatic shift in order to encompass the academic needs of the urban population. Kozol's (1991) conviction that the *Brown vs. Education* (1954) ruling did not solve the educational segregation of students was echoed by Blanchett in 2009. Blanchett (2009) argued that educational stakeholders need to bring the discrepancies between urban and suburban education to the surface, and not quiet down until something is done. Blanchett (2009) continued to state that the *Brown vs. Education* (1954) decision against racial segregation in schools also set in motion special education for students in need of such services.

Although the *Brown* ruling paved the way for students with disabilities to receive a free and appropriate education Section 504, IDEA, and ADA (Blanchett, 2009), it is questioned still today whether these students, especially urban students, indeed received such an education. IDEA is credited as having the most influence on the rights of special education students in the



areas of (a) a free and appropriate education, (b) the least restrictive environment, (c) an individualized education program, (d) appropriate and nondiscriminatory evaluations, (e) parental and student participation in decision making, and (f) procedural safeguards (Blanchett, 2009; Smith, 2004). Even though positive changes were set into motion, it was found that segregation still resided in schools. “Many students with disabilities were being educated in segregated self-contained settings with little to no exposure or access to their nondisabled peers” (Blanchett and Shealey, 2005 as cited in Blanchett, 2009, p. 375).

Many educators whose decisions attracted them to urban and/or high-poverty schools were found to have based those decisions on ethics (Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Freedman & Appleman, 2009; Margolis & Deuel, 2009; Ng & Peter, 2010; Stotko, Ingram, & Beaty-O’Ferrall, 2007 as cited in Santoro, 2011, p. 4). Diametric to research on the role of ethics and the decision to teach in the urban setting is the lack of research on the role ethics plays in a teacher’s decision to leave the urban sector (Hansen, 1995, as cited in Santoro, 2011, p. 4). When teachers are faced with challenges in the workplace, they begin to weigh their circumstances against their initial decision to join the educational workforce. This act of balancing demands and ethics is a common response to NCLB by teachers in general (Santoro, 2011).

This chapter examined many of the challenges encountered by urban students and teachers. Issues surrounding standards-based reform, including the impetus for and effects on urban education were dissected. Pivotal discussions surrounding teacher retention and subsequent effects on academic achievement of urban students was placed under the microscope. Finally, this chapter aimed to set the stage to identify the possible effects of Detroit’s economic crisis of 2009 on urban education, including its teachers.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODS**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the decision-making process of teachers, Kindergarten through twelfth grade, who left the urban setting in metropolitan Detroit. Factors that influenced such teachers' decisions to leave the urban setting in metropolitan Detroit following its economic decline in 2009 were identified. This chapter discussed the design, the research questions, the participants, the setting, the procedures, the researcher's role, the data collection methods, the data analysis, the trustworthiness and the ethical considerations, and concluded with the chapter summary.

### **Design**

A phenomenological study was chosen to best portray the lived experiences of participants. The overarching intent of this type of study was to identify the meaning behind participants' lived experiences (Van Manen, 1990). Phenomenology is a reflective process that brought ideas and experiences of individuals who experienced a similar phenomenon to the conscious forefront (Van Manen, 1990). The researcher engaged the participants through a focus group and individual interviews. Then, through an analysis of responses, I elucidated a picture of the experienced phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

This study used a qualitative, transcendental phenomenological approach. It was framed through two theoretical lenses: external locus of control and decision-theory. A qualitative approach was used as voices were heard rather than a quantitative study that reports statistical reasons behind teacher's decisions. A transcendental phenomenological approach was selected as I attempted to bracket my own experiences in urban education from those of the participants, also coined by Husserl as *epoche* (Moustakas, 1994).

Transcendental phenomenology was believed by Husserl to be the basis of all phenomenology. Through transcendental phenomenological view, the participant derives their viewpoint from their lived experiences (Welton, 2000). Welton quoted Husserl as stating, “Only the pure lived experience as fact, that which remains uncontested even if I assume that there is no world, is the apodictic, the transcendental ‘phenomenon’ of phenomenology” (Welton, 2000, p. 135). Although I, as an educator in the urban setting had my experiences and viewpoints about teaching in this sector, I could not simulate the experiences or perceptions of others.

Transcendental phenomenology also involves the triangulation of data collection and analysis which shed light on the common themes behind teachers’ decisions to leave the urban setting in metropolitan Detroit. The focus of inquiry was on the decision-making process of teachers, Kindergarten through twelfth grade, to leave the urban setting in metropolitan Detroit, following the city’s economic downfall of 2009. The participants left as a result of circumstances seemingly beyond their control.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions framing this study were as follows:

**RQ1:** How do select teachers, Kindergarten through twelfth grade, describe the decision-making process they underwent before leaving urban education?

**RQ2:** How do participants describe their experiences prior to their decision to leave urban education in metropolitan Detroit?

**RQ3:** What factors do participants identify as contributing to their decisions to leave the urban education setting in metropolitan Detroit?

**RQ4:** What do participants think about their decision since leaving urban education in metropolitan Detroit?

### Setting

Most of this study took place within metropolitan Detroit, dependent upon each interviewee's choice of individual interview locale. For the focus group, participants were offered a choice of meeting in one location for a face-to-face interview, or meeting via WebEx, a video conferencing communication site. The choice of the majority of participants was the deciding factor of how the focus group was held; the meeting was held in-person. Through the sampling process, it was discovered that not all participants still lived within the metropolitan Detroit area. In addition, due to time constraints, some participants who reside in metropolitan Detroit chose to meet through WebEx. I made arrangements to either travel to their location or conduct individual interviews through WebEx.

Metropolitan Detroit was selected as this study sought to identify the lived experiences of urban within the metropolitan Detroit area, post the city's economic crisis of 2009. According to the United States Census Bureau, approximately 83% of Detroit's population is comprised of African Americans (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Less than half of a percent are American Indian or Alaskan Native. Just over 1% are Asian, 6.8% Hispanic or Latino, and 2.2% make up two or more races. Caucasians represent 10.6% of Detroit's population (2010).

Other demographics that pertain to Detroit consist of (a) education, (b) homeownership, and (c) household income. Of those ages 25 and over, 77.6% received high school diplomas between the years 2009-2013. Of the same age group and also during the years 2009-2013, only 12.7% obtained a Bachelor's degree or higher. The homeownership rate was 51.9% between 2009-2013, with 349,170 housing units in 2010 and 256,599 households between the years 2009-2013. The median household income between the years 2009-2013 was \$26,325 with 39% of the population living below poverty level (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

## **Participants**

I used purposeful sampling to commence my study (Patton, 2002, p. 230). I began through two means, the first of which is asked school administrators, through e-mail, for the names of anyone who left the profession of urban education, either in general or special education, in metropolitan Detroit, for reasons other than negative retention or the purposes of raising a family. The second method I used was to contact potential participants referred by others. I contacted potential participants through one of three means (a) e-mail, (b) letter, or (c) phone. The process of snowball sampling (Patton, p. 237) occurred from there. Each potential participant received a letter that requested their participation. Participants included teachers who have left the profession or urban education since 2009. This time-frame boundary was for a few reasons: teachers' reasons for leaving were fresh in their memory, standards-based reform mandates recently became more demanding on educators, and Detroit's economy recently took a downward turn in 2009.

In order to portray a deep understanding of lived experiences (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002), the sample size included 10 participants, as it was expected that data would saturate at that point. Participants taught in the urban field for a minimum of two years. Generally, the first year of teaching was spent getting to know the parameters of the job and the culture of the school. During the second year, the teacher had more of an idea of how he or she was going to instruct and was able to formulate a better opinion of the position. In addition, the timeframe signified that the teacher should have been assigned a mentor teacher, as mentors are generally required the first three years. Teachers who taught for two years versus those with decades of classroom experience held varying viewpoints, as well. Age of the participants did factor in the study but rather an eclectic group of years taught, ethnicity, as well as gender, brought a vast

amount of thoughts and experiences to the study. Participants comprised the following: (a) eight master teachers (four or more years), (b) two novice teachers (two to three years, as first year teachers were not included), (c) two male teachers, and (d) teachers with varying ethnicities, including, but not limited to, Caucasian and African American.

Further, teachers who taught in either a general education or self-contained classroom setting were sought for this study. This study also permitted co-teachers, as they also have experience with state and federal mandates. Each of these variables illuminated participants' lived experiences of teaching within the urban environment. General education teachers interact with students on a daily, regular basis and were able to provide insight into their experiences. Special education teachers shed light from another angle, as their time with each student was limited. Teachers who left due to wanting to raise a family were excluded from the study, as extraneous circumstances were sought. Teachers who left due to negative retention were also excluded. I was able to ascertain whether potential participants met this study's requirements when I asked individuals for recommendations, and when I sent participants the informed consent. When I asked individuals for recommendations, I stated that I was looking for teachers who decided to leave the urban educational setting in metropolitan Detroit, post 2009, albeit altogether or [that] particular setting. The informed consent which was sent to potential participants explicitly stated that I sought teachers who made the decision to leave the urban educational setting in metropolitan Detroit, post 2009, albeit altogether or [that] particular setting. Individual answers to interview questions also confirmed that participants chose to leave the urban educational setting.

Information on where participants went after leaving the urban education setting in Detroit gave further insight as to how their experiences and decision-making process played a

role in their lives. Such information provided insight to researchers, administrators, and policymakers of potential weaknesses within the urban elementary education setting. I began the initial search for participants by e-mailing administrators of urban elementary schools within metropolitan Detroit, delineating the purpose of my study and requesting contact information of potential participants. Only e-mail addresses or phone numbers requested as to respect the privacy of potential participants. This initial approach proved futile, as the majority of e-mails went unanswered. A follow-up call to a school resulted in learning that potential names could not be released, according to the H.I.P.P.A. law. Next, I contacted potential participants through referrals made by others. The process of snowball sampling was then utilized (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007).

### **Procedures**

Before I could collect data, I secured approval through Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendices A and B). Upon approval, I conducted a pilot study with a small sample (see Appendix C). The purpose of the pilot study was to determine if the selected interview questions were clear (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). I audio-record participants' responses. Participant responses were transcribed by me, which I then analyzed and coded for themes. Information from the pilot study proved helpful for the study, and was disclosed in Chapter Four.

Following the pilot study, I used purposive, snowball sampling procedures to locate participants for my study (Patton, 2002). I contacted superintendents of urban schools within metropolitan Detroit through e-mail for recommendations of potential participants (see Appendix D). I also contacted potential participants from referrals through others. Participants were contacted through one of three scripted means as delineated in the appendices section (a) face-to-

face (see Appendix E), (b) phone call (see Appendix E) or (c) e-mail (see Appendix F). I kept a record through Microsoft Word of (a) school contact information, (b) dates requests were sent, (c) dates responses were received, (e) type of response received in the form of Y for yes and N for no, (e) names and contact information of potential participants, (f) participants' preferences for location of both the focus group and individual interview(s), (g) type(s) of documents received, and (h) any other pertinent contact information for ease of access and accurate record keeping. Information regarding the nature of the study was disclosed to each potential participant, as well as their role in the study. Information disclosed to potential participants, as well as to those who recommended potential participants, included the qualifications of potential participants. This was to exclude individuals who left due to wanting to move or start a family, did not teach within an urban setting of metropolitan Detroit for a minimum of two years, or had experienced negative retention. Consent forms delineating the qualifications of potential participants were also presented and signed by each individual who agreed to participate in this study (see Appendices E and F).

Participants were provided the option of participating in the focus group face-to-face, or via WebEx, a teleconferencing portal. The location selected by the majority of participants was used. The purpose of the focus group was to ascertain participants' overall thoughts and experiences within the urban setting, Kindergarten through twelfth grade, in metropolitan Detroit including (a) perceived necessary qualifications for an urban school to be effective, (b) perceived preparation received to teach in an urban setting, (c) perception of the mentor-mentee experience as it pertained and (d) professional development/learning courses with regard to type and effectiveness (see Appendix G). The focus group interview was recorded for later transcription.



The majority of focus group participants chose to meet in person. The others did not have a preference either way. The focus group was audio-recorded.

The next step in data collection involved individual interviews (see Appendix H). Interviews took place at an agreed upon location. When time or distance was factor, a teleconferencing portal was used. Questions centered on each participant's (a) decision to enter education, and moved from education in general to specifically, the urban setting, Kindergarten through twelfth grade, and (b) each participant's decision to leave urban education. Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. The interviews were analyzed and coded for themes (see Appendix I). Following data analysis, member-checks were used for credibility (Creswell, 2007). It was hoped that data would also be collected through documents such as (a) journals, (b) copies of e-mails from participants regarding their experiences and decisions to leave the urban setting and (c) any other documents the participants believed added meaning to his or her experienced phenomenon (see Appendix J). However, such documents were unavailable.

### **The Researcher's Role**

As the researcher, I held a central, instrumental role in the study. I am a doctoral candidate in a curriculum and instruction program. I have taught in public, private, charter, special education, and Montessori settings; grades taught include Preschool through 12th grades. My 14 years in education have included teaching in both predominantly Hispanic and African American settings. A female Caucasian educator, I taught the past eight years in an urban elementary charter school serving predominantly African American students who mostly reside in Detroit, though my school is located in the suburbs of metropolitan Detroit. In this setting, I served as a First Grade teacher an Elementary Mathematics Coach and a Fourth Grade teacher.

Throughout my time teaching in the urban sector, I have witnessed the economic decline of metropolitan Detroit as a result of the restructuring of the Chrysler, General Motors, and Ford automotive industries, commonly referred to as the Big Three. I understand terms such as “underwater”, which means that a home owner’s mortgage exceeds its present value. Subsequently, far too many “For Sale” or “Foreclosed” signs have been placed in yards. Linked to the decline was a drop in student performance. Standards-based reform entered the scene as policymakers sought to raise educational awareness and performance (Carbonaro & Coway, 2010).

I was responsible for personally holding a focus group, conducting interviews, collecting data, and analyzing the data. In line with Maxwell’s (2013) suggestion to collect multiple sources of data, I used a triangulation method of: (a) a focus group, (b) interviews, and (c) member checks. Peer review assisted the triangulation process. I have prior knowledge based on my experiences of teaching in an urban elementary setting within metropolitan Detroit.

I personally knew participants for the pilot study, and knew some of the study’s participants. I held my own views of what teachers experience in urban schools, and had to make sure that I did not discuss my views and feelings with the participants. I had to bracket myself (Moustakas, 1994) from participants’ experiences. Since a transcendental phenomenological approach was employed, I needed to make sure that I excluded my own voice in my data collection and analysis procedures. It was necessary that I interpreted the experiences of participants through their lenses, not mine. Referred to as *epoché*, bracketing requires the researcher to set aside preconceived judgments or convictions about the phenomenon studied, thus allowing the participants’ voices to be heard (Moustakas, 1994).

### **Data Collection**

In order to ensure credibility, Patton (2002) recommends that a triangulation of data collection methods be utilized. Patton (2002) stated, “By using a variety of sources and resources, the evaluator observer can build on the strengths of each type of data collection while minimizing the weaknesses of any single approach” (Patton, 2002, 307). In this transcendental phenomenological approach, data collection followed the order of (a) focus group, (b) interviews, and (c) member checks (Patton, 2002). The focus group commenced the study as it provided a backdrop of the factors that contributed to participants’ decisions to leave the urban setting. Individual interviews followed as they allowed the participants to further elaborate on the discussion that took place within the focus group. Member checks occurred throughout the interview process, as I sought clarification as necessary. Further member checks occurred upon completion of data analysis. The documents and their analysis allowed me to confirm and expand on participants’ responses. Member checks allowed me to analyze correct data, and ensure credibility of my analysis.

The focus group provided valuable insight, but not necessarily all of the information that was required for a complete study, i.e., not all participants were able to attend the focus group. All participants may not have felt comfortable disclosing some information in front of others, and hence waited until the individual interview. Interviews can fall prey to human error (Patton, 2002) therefore, it was necessary to have more than one type of data collection. Thus, the triangulation of data helped the researcher find commonalities among information and make reasonable conclusions. The focus group was audio recorded and transcribed for analysis. I audio recorded and transcribed each interview for analysis. I also used the process of member checks to ensure credibility.

## Focus Group

Once participants were selected, consent forms were given. A focus group was formed and met face-to-face. The choice of the focus group location was agreed upon by the majority of participants. This initial discussion of the phenomenon of why participants left the field of urban education provided prompts for future questions in the individual interviews. Through the use of focused questions, the participants were asked to respond to a series of successive questions which moved from broad to narrow. This helped participants begin to feel comfortable with the focus group process and listen to the responses of others which also assist in the recall process (Krueger, 2006). The same participants agreed to participate in a follow-up individual interview. This was for two reasons: (a) the participants thought of more that they want to add once the focus group session has ended, (b) additional questions were asked and (c) the participants felt more comfortable disclosing information in a one-on-one atmosphere.

Table 1

### *Focus Group Interview Questions*

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#### Questions

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#### *Urban Education in Retrospect*

1. Why did you decide to become a teacher?
2. What would you describe as the main reason you held for leaving the urban setting?
3. In your opinion, what are the necessary qualifications for an urban school to be effective?
4. How well do you feel that your teacher preparatory program prepared you for the urban environment?

5. Teachers new to a district are generally assigned a mentor teacher. How would you describe the mentoring relationship, either as the mentor or the mentee, if this pertains to your experience in the urban setting?
  6. Professional development/learning courses are often required for certification purposes. What courses were offered in order to hone your pedagogy?  
Probe: How would you describe these courses and their outcome?
  7. Is there anything else related to this topic you would like to add?
  8. Is it alright to do a follow-up interview via email or phone, if needed?
- 

The focus group questions were broader and geared toward group discussion. Each question was designed with the purpose of prompting conversation among the participants, as memories are often triggered through discussion. Question one was designed to cultivate a sense of community among the participants. As each participant brought their thoughts, feelings, and opinions to the table, they had the opportunity to share what changes they wanted to see in the urban school setting. It was possible that participants chose to discuss (a) standards-based reform (Carbonaro & Covay, 2010) and its subsequent systems and mandates such as NCLB (Hochbein et al., 2013), AYP (Hunt et al., 2009; Walker, 2011), School of Choice (Butcher, 2013; Maayan, 2013), Race to the Top (Jacobs, 2010), CCSS (Kendall, 2011; Klotz, 2012; Tienken & Orlich, 2013), or SMARTER Balanced assessments (SMARTER, 2014), (b) teacher evaluations (Walker, 2011), (c) teacher-student relationships (Gehlbach, Brinkworth, & Harris, 2012), or (d) school culture (Klassen et al., 2011). As expected, the responses paved the path for several probing questions.

Question two stemmed from the first in that each participant reflected on how well their teacher preparatory program readied them for the urban experience (Assaf, Garza, & Battle,

2010). Questions three and four continued the sequence of questions as they led into the discussion of mentor/mentee experiences (Hass, 2012) and professional development/learning opportunities (Carr, 2011). The mentoring experience, if executed correctly, is an invaluable tool for beginning teachers who are new to the urban elementary setting or teaching altogether. Perhaps Hass (2012) said it best: “We must clearly send the message to new teachers that they are not replacing other teachers who resigned or retired; instead, each new teacher is hired based on what he or she can bring to that position” (Hass, 2012, p. 12). Equally valuable to the teaching is professional development/learning. New teachers need exposure to courses that will increase their repertoire of instructional strategies. Opportunities to interact and learn from educators with more experience benefit the teacher. The benefits funnel down to the students.

## **Interviews**

Prior to the interview process, experts in the field of phenomenological research were consulted to review each question. Second, interview questions were piloted to a small group to assess for clarity. Once participants were selected, consent forms were given. Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted with each participant and each took place at an agreed upon location. If time or distance was a factor (participants reside further than three hours of driving distance) interviews took place through WebEx, a teleconferencing portal. However, I disclosed to participants that face-to-face interviews may enhance the interview’s outcome. Standardized, open-ended questions formed the basis of each interview as I was able to use probes for further elaboration on the participants’ answers (Gall et al., 2007; Patton, 2002). Consent forms indicated that a follow-up interview was possible. The use of member-checks ensured credibility (Gall et al., 2007).

Table 2

*Open-Ended Interview Questions*

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Questions

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*The Decision to Enter Education*

1. During the focus group, you answered the question about why you decided to become a teacher. Would you like to expand on your answer?
2. How long did you teach in the urban setting?
3. What grade(s) did you teach?
4. What factors led you to teach in the urban setting?
5. How would you describe your philosophy of teaching?

Probe: How did your philosophy impact or negate your overall experience within the urban setting?

6. How did teaching in the urban setting alter your view of the educational system?

Probe: What positive experiences, if any, have you had with teaching in the urban setting?

Probe: Can you describe an example (Maxwell, 2013, p. 103)?

*The Decision to Leave Urban Education*

1. Would you say that you felt effective as a teacher? In what ways did you or did you not feel effective?
2. How would you describe the level of trust you felt between you and your co-workers?  
Between you and your students? Between you and your boss?
3. What changes would you like to see in urban education?

4. How do you feel about your decision to leave the urban setting?
  5. Where did you go or what did you do after you left urban education?
  6. Is there anything else related to this topic you would like to add?
  7. Is it alright to do a follow-up interview through e-mail or phone, if needed?
- 

Moustakas (1994) suggested the use of two broad, open questions. To begin the one-one interview process, I asked the basic questions of number of years spent teaching in the urban setting and grade(s) taught. In order to acquire insight into the hearts and minds of the participants, initial deeper questioning began with reasons behind the decision to teach in the urban setting in the first place. As expected, this strategy illuminated some of the real reasons individuals entered the field of urban education, thus providing an initial glimpse into the feelings of both internal and external loci of control (Rotter, 1990). Question three led to the fourth which allowed participants to discuss their philosophy of teaching. This, in turn, shed light on whether a teacher's philosophy aligned with what was expected from him or her, or even if the participants felt that they had the freedom to incorporate their philosophy of education. Following the question and discussion on the personal philosophy of teaching, the participants were asked to describe how their view of teaching in the urban setting changed, if it pertained to their experience. The individual interview process reached full-circle when the former urban teachers were asked to reflect on their decision to leave that same setting and offer any suggestions for improvement within that setting.

### **Researcher's Journal**

I used the process of reflective memos and kept a journal to track the research study's progression (Maxwell, 2013). It was hoped that documents were available, as the inclusion of



documents could provide another glimpse into the experienced phenomenon of the participants. However, such documents that contained written thoughts, feelings, or reactions to the phenomenon not necessarily expressed in the focus group or interview(s) were unavailable. Excerpts of two journal entries are located in Appendix K.

### **Data Analysis**

Moustakas (1994) recommends that transcendental phenomenology use the methods of horizontalization, clusters of meaning, and both textural and structural description (Moustakas, 1994).

#### **Horizontalization**

At the onset of horizontalization, each piece of participants' lived experiences was given "equal value". "Building on the data from the first and second research questions, data analysts go through the data (e.g., interview transcriptions) and highlight 'significant statements,' sentences, or quotes that provide an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon" (Creswell, 2007, p. 61). As data was analyzed, only statements that were relevant and non-repetitive were kept (Moustakas, 1994, p. 97). The remaining data were referred to as "*Horizons* (the textural meanings and invariant constituents of the phenomenon)" (p. 97).

#### **Clusters of Meaning**

The codes that were developed in the horizontalization phase assisted the researcher in the next phase of data analysis. In this next phase of phenomenological data analysis, the horizons were clustered into meaning, or *themes* (Moustakas, 1994, p. 97). There were three overarching themes (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990), which were further broken down into *subthemes* (Creswell, 2007, p. 153). In phenomenological research, "individual experiences and the context of those experiences" were the primary focus of the researcher (p. 153).

## **Textural and Structural Description**

Next, the researcher wrote textural descriptions. Textural descriptions provided both the “meanings and essences of the experiences” of the individuals and of the group as a whole (p. 121). In addition, “the significant statements and themes...were also used to write a description of the context or setting that influenced how the participants experienced the phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, p. 61). Structural descriptions followed this step, and the main focus was “on the common experiences of the participants” (p. 62).

Utilizing these techniques, I analyzed the data for specific themes based on participants’ statements that signified their decision to leave urban education in metropolitan Detroit (Moustakas, 1994). The focus group was audio-recorded and I transcribed, analyzed, and coded the responses for themes. Individual interviews of each participant were also audio-recorded and I transcribed, analyzed, and coded the responses for themes. Both the focus group and individual interviews were coded using highlighting and qualitative analysis software, Atlas.ti. Member-checks were used for the individual interviews to ensure credibility. A comparison of each theme across each form of data was made in order to identify and synthesize the overarching, common experiences of the phenomenon.

## **Trustworthiness**

### **Credibility**

Signed informed consent forms from each participant were obtained. Word-for-word transcription and careful analysis ensured that I analyzed each piece of information from the interview, both for the focus group and individual. Member-checks followed the transcription and analysis of each interview in order to confirm that individual responses were accurately portrayed (Patton, 2002). The use of member-checks also ensure an honest representation of

participants' stories, rather than my personal viewpoints. I kept a journal following each interview in order to bracket my personal experiences and viewpoints from clouding data analysis. Finally, as an educator in the field of urban education, I brought knowledge of the potential challenges participants face. I hold a Master of Arts Degree in Teaching and have successfully completed coursework in qualitative research methods at both the Master and Doctoral level from a fully accredited university.

### **Dependability and Confirmability**

As the researcher, I needed to apply data collection and analysis procedures consistently with all participants. It was necessary that I provide a correlation between a deep, thick, rich description of the study's purpose and participants' responses. The triangulation of the data collection process helped ensure against *validity threats* and the negative effects of *self-report bias* (Fielding and Fielding, 1986). An analysis of the results was compared to what was currently stated in the literature about factors affecting urban teachers (Maxwell, 2013).

Approval from Liberty University's Institutional Review Board assured the study was conducted in a trustworthy manner. Peer reviews were employed as well as a triangulation of data to confirm trustworthiness (Maxwell, 2013). Each form of data was weighed for consistency as each format elicited different responses. As the researcher, it was my job to look for, recognize, and understand any inconsistency and how it provided a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Patton, 2002).

### **Transferability**

It was anticipated that the results of the study would strongly correlate to pertinent areas of education within the urban setting. Educators and administrators alike would be able to utilize the results to improve areas such as school culture, school leadership, mentoring programs, and

pedagogy. Results of this study yielded information for colleges and universities to enhance or improve their urban education teacher preparatory programs. Policymakers could harness the results of this study to improve the educational system for urban teachers.

### **Ethical Considerations**

It was imperative that this study was conducted in an ethical manner. First and foremost, I obtained IRB approval. Subsequent approval was gained through participants' signed consent forms. Such forms were signed after each participant received information about the study's purpose, its voluntary nature and the right of each participant to withdraw at any time. The use of pseudonyms for proper names and places protected the privacy of each participant. Member-checks ensured that I correctly interpreted the data and also provided credibility to the study. While I could not guarantee that members of the focus group would not discuss the study or participant's responses, I assured each member through informed consent that I would not discuss one's responses with other people outside of the study. Since interviews took place in a location where participants felt most comfortable, such locations included public places. That increased the risk of researcher or participant recognition by a third party at the interview location. It was vital that the details of the study not be disclosed with non-participants in order to protect participant confidentiality. Further, tangible data was backed up and stored in a locked filing cabinet. Electronic data was password protected (Patton, 2002).

### **Summary**

This chapter discussed the rationale behind the transcendental phenomenological design. Research questions were restated. Criterion for participant selection was discussed, including characteristics that disqualified someone from the study. The setting disclosed a detailed description of the setting for the focus group along with the rationale for its choosing, and

location(s) and premise for the individual interviews. Procedures were outlined from university Institutional Review Board approval to data collection. My role as the researcher was discussed, along with the importance of bracketing myself from the data. Finally, a triangulation of data collection methods that included: (a) a focus group, (b) individual interviews, and (c) member checks was described in full detail, followed by data analysis measures, and discussions on both trustworthiness and ethical considerations

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

### Overview

In this chapter, participants' responses to their reasons for entering education and subsequently, urban education, were depicted in the individual portraits. A portrayal of each participant's educational philosophy was presented, along with the impacts of their philosophy, both positive and negative, on their experiences. The results section consisted of theme development and research question responses. This chapter concluded with a summary.

The purpose of this study was to understand the decision-making process of teachers who left the urban setting in metropolitan Detroit post 2009. The timeframe was selected in order to ascertain connections, if any, between teachers' decisions to leave and the economic decline of metropolitan Detroit. A transcendental, phenomenological approach was used in order to bring the experiences of each participant into the foreground (Moustakas, 1994) and keep my past and current experiences as a teacher within the urban setting at bay, also referred by Husserl as *epoche* (Moustakas, 1994). The theories that guided this study were Rotter's (1991) locus of control and Condorcet's decision theory (Hansson, 2005)

I began my research with a pilot study in order to test the validity of the interview questions. The results of that initial study were included in the final analysis. Next, I orchestrated a focus group interview. The participants in this study came together to discuss their teaching experiences within the urban setting. The questions from this interview, though they had some depth, served to create an environment in which the participants could feel safe to share thoughts and feelings. From the basic entry level question of why participants chose to enter education to more in-depth of recommendations to improve urban education, individual

responses triggered memories and elicited meaningful discussion. Participants were candid and genuine with their stories and beliefs.

Following the focus group interview, the same participants agreed to an additional individual interview. Thus, they were able to expand on and clarify previous answers if needed. This format also provided an opportunity to share experiences they might not have shared in the presence of others. Six additional participants agreed to interview individually, as well. These participants were either recommended by focus group participants, or by other teachers in the field. All participants represented both public and charter schools within metropolitan Detroit. This allowed the data to reach the point of saturation. Interviews were conducted in person or via WebEx, a teleconferencing portal (see Table 3).

A triangulation method was used to ensure credibility of the study and included (a) a focus group interview, (b) individual interviews and (c) member-checks (Patton, 2002). It was initially hoped that documents such as personal e-mails or journals would serve as the third piece of data. However, such information was not available. The use of member-checks was employed, as the participants themselves could affirm the correct interpretation of their data. I then transcribed both the focus group and individual interviews. Following transcription, I uploaded each interview into Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis software. Here, I was able to analyze each interview and assign codes. The codes were then organized and grouped by themes, according to the number of times they appeared in the overall study. I also used the process of highlighting to cross-check for duplication of themes. This process helped elucidate a picture of the experienced phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

I used the results of this study to depict the experiences of the participants. The participants were forthcoming with their responses, and thus provided deep, rich and thick

material, terms synonymous of a true qualitative study. With ontological relativity in mind, I knew that each participant would have different interpretations of a similar phenomenon (Patton, 2002). Therefore, I tried to view responses in an objective manner and protect the individuality of each participant's story. My goal of this study was to paint a picture of experiences within the urban setting that led teachers from a place of passion and purpose to a point of frustration and despair. It is of necessity to emphasize that while each participant expressed some negative experiences, the majority, not all of the participants, indicated feelings of hopelessness. An in-depth description of teachers' experiences within the urban setting will be depicted in the Results section of this chapter.

Four research questions set the foundation for this study and were used to form the basis of analysis:

1. How do select teachers, Kindergarten through twelfth grade, describe the decision-making process they underwent before leaving urban education in metropolitan Detroit?
2. How do participants describe their experiences prior to their decision to leave urban education in metropolitan Detroit?
3. What factors do participants identify as contributing to their decision to leave the urban education setting in metropolitan Detroit?
4. What do participants think about their decision since leaving urban education in metropolitan Detroit?

The premise of this study was to identify the reasons teachers chose to leave the urban education setting in metropolitan Detroit, post 2009. Since concrete factors such as negative retention or wanting to raise a family were excluded, it was expected that negative experiences



contributed to participants' decisions to leave. As the participants shared their experiences, three themes emerged: professional reasons for leaving the urban education setting, cultural reasons for leaving the urban educational setting and political reasons for leaving the urban education setting. Under the theme of professional reasons, teachers frequently spoke of a) insufficient administrative support, (b) insufficient preparation to teach in an urban environment/teacher education programs, (c) emotional distress and (d) self-efficacy. The latter are included as subthemes. Under the theme of cultural reasons, subthemes of (a) student behavior/little trust/social skills and (b) insufficient parental support and involvement were discussed. The theme of political reasons included subthemes of (a) insufficient funding to meet students' needs, (b) insufficient number of support staff, (c) state-mandated/standardized tests, (d) class size/caseload and (e) student attendance/tardiness.

## **Participants**

### **Group Portrait**

Ten teachers participated in this research study. Seven taught at the elementary level (Amy, Beth, Catherine, David, Grace, Hope and Isabelle). Catherine, Hope and Isabelle also gained teaching experience within the middle school setting. Fredrick brought one year of middle school experience to the study but spent the majority of his time at the high school level. Elizabeth and Jill both shared their experiences from the high school standpoint. Participants' years of experience at the time of each interview ranged from three to 20 (see Table 3).

Teachers in this study had different motivations for entering the field of education, which are depicted in their portrait. As I will discuss in this chapter, everyone initially did not have aspirations to teach. Likewise, participants held various reasons for leaving their urban setting. Three participants, Catherine, Fredrick and Grace, are still actively invested in urban education.

Each educator shared a common goal of doing whatever they could to reach and connect with their students. This shared vision of educating the whole child was evidenced through the participants' stories.

Hope, a Middle School Special Education teacher, recalled a couple of students several years behind in literacy skills. She understood the importance of relationship and paraphrased one of John C. Maxwell's (n.d.) famous quotes, "Kids don't care what you know until they know you care" (addictedtosuccess.com). She sought to develop relationships with students through study on poverty and an acknowledgement of basic needs. She stated,

They would come in like, 'I'm just really hungry,' and, you know, that was one way I could show them I cared about them. I would let them eat, or, you know, have a water bottle, and just uh, give, give them some food and snacks while we did work.

Isabelle talked about times she used her own resources to purchase materials for her classroom, from basic supplies such as pencils and paper, to larger, high-ticket items such as tables and chairs, since "I had more kids than chairs." She explained,

I had to have everything ready ahead of time. Always planning ahead and making sure that I had everything my class needed to run smoothly. And I didn't care about whatever it is I had to do—buy what I need to buy—These kids—they deserve to learn, and I don't want to inhibit their learning—I want everything to run smoothly—I wanted it to be perfect when it was me.

Fredrick purchased his own projector for the classroom, among anything else that he believed was necessary to enhance his effectiveness. In order to ascertain students' needs, he utilized information he received from parents and conversations with the students. He shared, "Just trying to have those conversations with students, not about Math, not about school, but just

about, um, what’s happening in their life in general.” To combat lack of classroom time to develop relationships with his students, he would meet with students who wanted to stay after school. He also shared, “I would go out to the community, um, go shopping inside the area.”

Table 3

*Participant Overview*

Participant	Elementary	Middle	High	Interview Format
Amy	3 years			Face-to-Face
Beth	8 years			Face-to-Face
Catherine	5 years	15 years		WebEx*
David	13 years			WebEx*
Elizabeth			3 years	Face-to-Face
Fredrick		1 year	13 years	WebEx*
Grace	4 years			Face-to-Face*
Hope	7 years	1 year**		WebEx
Isabelle	7 years**	2 years**		WebEx
Jill			10 years**	WebEx

\*denotes participant also contributed to the Focus Group interview (Face-to-Face)

\*\*denotes participant’s teaching experience included Special Education (SPED)

**Individual Portraits**

At the surface, the individual portraits in this section provide information as to why participants chose the teaching profession and how they entered the urban setting. Digging deeper, each individual’s philosophy of education is presented, along with experiences that positively impacted or negated said philosophy. The information presented in this section compares and contrasts participants’ initial philosophical beliefs and expectations with their actual experiences, thus laying the groundwork for research questions two and three. All names (teachers, students, schools and cities) are pseudonyms.

**Amy.** With her teaching credentials secured, Amy found it difficult to obtain a job for two years, and thus spent her earlier days as a substitute teacher. The school that eventually had an opening and offered her a full-time position was within the urban setting of metropolitan Detroit. Amy did not have a particular inclination toward any type of setting. She was thankful

to have a class to call her own and instill her love of learning. Amy taught in that capacity for three years.

When asked to describe her philosophy of education, Amy emphasized her belief in everyone's ability to learn; it is up to the teacher to find the method befitting each student. She stated,

I would say that I do feel like even with the students who are considered learning disabled or, um, have some kind of disability preventing them from, of learning...at the same pace as everybody else, I don't, I still believe that everybody has that ability to learn...um, and that it's our job to just find what works.

Amy continued to explain that her philosophy changed each year with experience. She recognized the need to learn and adapt as new students entered her room. Amy also discovered that the reality of actual classroom teaching did not align with her expectations. She recalled the dichotomy between her beliefs of what teaching should entail, and the reality of what it actually entailed:

I just feel like when I first started I had like these expectations that weren't realistic. Um, you always think about how you're gonna teach and then you actually get into teaching and it's *completely* different. Um, not that I lowered my expectations, but I just had this, um, ideal of what it was gonna be like, and it, it wasn't. And I honestly don't think there's anything out there that can prepare you for what it *really* is until you're actually in it and doing it, and I think that's why, I mean, I'm still considered a new teacher, so, I feel like it's still, developing that philosophy every year as I learn...and I don't know if that'll ever change, honestly. I think just as I gain more experience and, um, have different types of students each year, it'll

manifest as I go.

Amy further explained her stance on expectations and the negative impact of the classroom environment that left her questioning her philosophical assumptions and beliefs.

I honestly feel like if you keep your expectations high, that um, the students will rise to that expectation. Well, unfortunately in that setting, a lot of times, they didn't because it wasn't just your expectations that...like my expectations are high but it's hard to keep that expectation when so many things are working against it. Um, I feel like a lot of times so many excuses were made for them not rising to those expectations that they never...it was never set in stone that they had to, so they *knew* that there was always this loophole so they could um, not fit in and not meet that expectation. So I feel like that really um, I don't know, it, it felt disappointing or maybe that there was a long period of time when maybe I felt like I was expecting too much. Um, and then you'd get that student here or there that would always rise to that expectation and then you know, it's that gratifying feeling that they *can* do it, um, as long as they know there's no other choice. So I guess, I don't know...I don't know what it is that makes it that way, but I don't know if it's that maybe I was expecting too much or...you know there's always going to be the exception to the, to the norm and I don't know if that's the case?

**Beth.** Beth brought eight years of teaching experience to the table. When studying to become a teacher, she was confident that she wanted to teach elementary-aged students. Beth, too, found it difficult to obtain a teaching position post-graduation. The first job available was within an urban elementary setting in metropolitan Detroit.

Beth held the philosophical belief that every child can learn; the teacher is the rudder that steers the ship. She explained,

We're a very complicated species. Everybody learns in their own way, and yet, the baggage that we sometimes arrive with can either hinder or help how we learn because it could just not be important to us, or to our families, or it could be really important to us, it could be our ticket out... I just, I think every kid can learn, it's just this interesting kind of struggle, and the teacher has to figure out how to reach each kid. But it might not even be academic; it might just be a support system for them. They trust you, therefore, they try. But, every kid can learn. It's just how, um, trying to get each kid invested in it.

With a dismal sigh, Beth shared how her teaching career began with passion, but by year six had turned into survival, feelings of detachment, and left her almost to the point of not caring. She shared,

I was passionate, and I was trying to reach each kid and be the support that they needed. But by the end of my time there, I hate to say I didn't care, but I kind of didn't because I was, it now turned into survival of just getting through the day and the year...and there was no support, and there, the paycheck sucked so it wasn't even that. And it was just kind of like, 'Why am I here?' So, by the end of it, it was just kind of like, I didn't even know what my philosophy was at that point, you know?

When asked what changed, Beth expressed her aggravation with "stress...lack of appreciation and the *terrible* paycheck. She questioned, "Why would anybody go into this profession?"

**Catherine.** Teenagers are often encouraged to think of future career interests. Incredibly gifted in the areas of mathematics and analytic thinking, Catherine was often encouraged to pursue a career in engineering or a field that utilized similar strengths. Although she had copious opportunities to work with children and found that she “enjoyed that tremendously,” teaching was not initially on her list. She explained,

Basically, folks told me I was too smart to be a teacher. And so, while I believed that that was actually true, um, and then I realized that actually teachers have to be the smartest people on the planet (laughs), not, not the weakest ones, right?—We have the greatest responsibility.—That realization came around the time when I was taking computer science and then engineering courses and not liking it at all. And so spending, spending my summers teaching at camp and doing other opportunities like that, and I finally just said you know what, this is something I love to do. It’s what I’m good at, and it’s what makes me happy. And you know, I could be a really smart teacher, too.

Raised in Detroit, Catherine never questioned her choice to teach in Detroit. She knew that the place she called home was part of “an underserved community” in which she could “bring some strength and instruction—to students who weren’t always afforded high-quality teaching.” Catherine described herself as “a traditional teacher—with a non-traditional philosophy.” She sought to balance the two worlds of traditionalism and constructivism in each setting she encountered. She believed that “learning is constructed—and—formed in communities and social collaboration” and thus incorporated “a lot of discussion and interaction” with and among her students, which afforded many opportunities of “developing conceptual understanding.” Catherine felt fortunate to be able to work alongside other professionals who shared her philosophy.

I was able to align myself with educators who saw the whole child and believed the same way that I did, that learning was constructed and needed to be supported through um, social interaction rather than, um, rather than one extreme, you know, being in a total constructivist situation or a totally traditional situation, or even in a situation where people just didn't care.—To say more—being invested in a, in a view of education and being surrounded by colleagues who were similarly invested, probably kept me, um, in the setting longer than I might have otherwise.

**David.** Resultant of an accident, a close relative of David's lost the ability to perform basic skills. David discovered the joy of teaching while helping his family member overcome the hurdles she now faced. Later, he spent a decade as a substitute teacher in an elementary school. During this time, he found that he enjoyed working with kids and subsequently pursued a degree in education. The first position that opened was within an urban district. Although David's first years working as a substitute took place in a non-urban setting, he observed strong correlations between that setting and the urban school. Both served students with a low socioeconomic status. He stated,

I don't think that a lot of the situations as far as uh, the, the problems and the challenges you face in a primarily African American setting is much different than a predominantly White setting if the socioeconomic status is the same. Um, I don't think race is a huge factor. I mean, it is a factor insofar as there's unique challenges that African Americans face, but I don't necessarily believe that it's such a difference that we mean Black America that causes those problems...and a lot of these kids had came (*sic*) from very broken homes, came from parents who didn't give a crap...even with the White students I taught in Faircliff. Um, it didn't matter, like that, most challenges were still the same.



Um, you know, living in America being Black is definitely a different vibe altogether... so I know that they face a unique set of challenges. But the majority of the problems as far as behavior and issues, and not being prepared for, to be educated, and, you know, not treating school with great importance, that was the same among the two groups.

David took a holistic approach to education. He avoided a philosophy that consisted of “rote, ‘drill and kill’ learning.” Referring to himself as a White, suburban individual he explained, “I tried to make it so that it was relevant to students’ lives, which was extremely challenging working with the African American students—finding out what makes them tick and how they could make this relevant to their lives.” David’s brief time in the elementary urban setting was spent in two different grade levels. At the beginning, he witnessed the positive impact his philosophy had on his students, both academically and socially. Disappointedly, he could not say the same for the latter years.

It started near the end to transition from, you know, trying to get them to learn, you know, the stuff that they were expected to learn to get them to understand how to be decent to one another.—It transitioned from being more, you know, standards-based to more humanistic-based, where I was not so much focused on content and I was spending a *ton* of my time just focused in on social skills and whatever behaviors so they could be decent to one another. So, I mean, my philosophy as far as how to teach [them] was still pretty much the same, and that became a little bit easier. But it was, you know, my drive and what I was trying to do vastly changed from a purely what I was trying to teach point.

**Elizabeth.** Elizabeth brought a unique perspective to the study as she was the only participant who began her career under the Teach for America umbrella. To Elizabeth, school

was “home away from home,” an experience that she “really enjoyed.” Her story helped paint a picture of her motivation to teach.

Growing up, uh, school was kind of my escape a little bit from family life, and so I always looked up to the teachers and people there, and I always valued education as kind of like a way for me, to—like, my family’s from the country, and uh, none of them went to college, and that type of thing. It was kind of, um, I saw it as an avenue to sort of get a different life. Or, at least that was my hope.—And then um, when I was an undergraduate, I signed up to do some volunteering and I did tutoring with uh, with one girl. I stayed with the same girl from like Fourth Grade, um, to Eighth Grade and helped her with her reading.—So I was helping her get through that, and just kind of working with her all those four years, and uh—I really enjoyed it and I wanted to see if I could do it.

Elizabeth chose to enter the urban setting because she “was kind of compelled to the mission that Teach for America had.” She shared her personal experience of attending school outside her community. Her mother moved with her daughter’s education in mind, “because it was such a better school.” With disgust, Elizabeth reiterated her feelings from that time.

I saw the difference, and I didn’t ever, I didn’t like that. I thought, you know, what crap that I have to, we have to change our whole life. Like, I don’t even get to be around my family. Like, I have to *move* an hour-and-a-half away from them, and go to this school. And I appreciated—the mission of Teach for America. I thought it was kind of, you know, understanding that this is unfair. Right? This, this whole where you live, um, determines the quality of education you get. And this is just, that irked me from when I was little.—Because of my background, you know, people from like the working class and, and um, I honestly just feel more, not necessarily urban or rural. You know what I

mean? I just kind of wanted to be around some people that were sort of from a family background like mine.

After what she described as “six weeks of very intense training,” Elizabeth was placed in her first true setting. She recognized the difference between the inner-city and rural environments, but stated that, “in a lot of ways it was the same—as far as um, you know, not coming from like a lot of wealth.” A Ninth Grade teacher, Elizabeth taught Math for two years, then Science in year three. She spent two years in her first setting. She took time off for personal reasons, and later joined another high school in what became her final year in education.

Teach for America was not credited with giving Elizabeth tools to develop a personal philosophy of education, a component that she believed was necessary “to ground yourself in.” Her time in the classroom gave her values credence.

I guess it’s like the philosophy I always could say, but you know, believing it is another thing. I mean—maybe I really didn’t *think* about why education’s important. Education’s important to get you out of, you know, here. Right? To get you somewhere. Um, and learning is fun for the sake of learning. But then I kind of developed more—I mean, I started to realize how much it was, um, character development. Right? Learning how to be a good citizen. Be a good person, you know? A whole, well-rounded human—practicing things like integrity, um, learning how to control your emotions, control your anger, and also be okay with yourself—And all these skills and all these, these important things that went into being human, and, um, in order, like I just, basically I just wanted them to be happy, whole individuals, that kind of have, have the ability to see, think and feel comfortable in the world to explore and, you know, be compassionate

with other people. So, you know, I kind of had more like a—picture, you know, in my head of just like each one of them at their fullest potential.—And so, it was always, I guess the root thing, you know, *more* than the curriculum, was always just, um, trying to be good to one another, and trying to get comfortable with this idea of constant learning—and improvement—towards being a good citizen, living a good life.

Elizabeth associated her philosophy with positive memories. She attributed the benefits to having “a vision” and “being able to kind of communicate that.”

Everybody wants to be happy, you know? So being able to talk with students and knowing that what I was working for was their best interest—or their, their best self, their happiness—whatever that was—that kind of had some leeway, you know? I kind of, I guess in a way it’s like you just love the kids, you know what I mean? And that entails, okay, well they’re gonna do some stupid stuff (laughs), but it’s gonna be okay, you know? You just take care, and you know, maybe, maybe their opinions might be different from mine, and I just want them to kind of, you know, go off in whatever direction they think, within bounds, right?—So, I think a lot of times it was positive, because, you know, speaking to ideas like integrity, and speaking to these big values, you know, as far as like treating people um, like you want to be treated, and, and uh, try to be the bigger person and not taking things personally and not being so insecure, but being confident enough that you can handle these situations. When I was communicating these types of things and also addressing problems so, I guess, more concretely, right? When you have that value grounded and you’re addressing problems in the classroom then your *why* of what you’re doing never is, ‘Because I said so,’ or ‘Because it’s the *rule*.’ Um, because, I mean, especially in, in an urban environment, they’re like, you know, ‘Screw

that.’ Right? Um, because *they* have a value operating system. Um, and so when I had that and I showed that, I think that they were *so* much more responsive to what I had to say, and it really helped with management.

**Fredrick.** Like Catherine, Fredrick’s circle of influence tried to steer him away from teaching. In college, he set out to pursue a career along the lines of engineering, computer science, or robotics. He soon realized that he did not want to continue on that path. Fredrick recalled positive experiences working with his youth group during his high school years. He also attached favorable memories to tutoring, a service project requirement of the National Honor Society. Again, he brought up the idea of teaching, only to find opposition from those he cared for. Finally, Fredrick stated that teaching was what he wanted to do.

Fredrick turned down an invitation to interview with a wealthy, high-performing school district. He believed that the students in the high-performing district would do well regardless and wanted to work with students who faced more challenges. When he first developed his philosophy in teacher preparatory classes, he believed that student learning mattered, not race. As he grew as a teacher, he still held to his belief that student learning was first and foremost. However, his belief expanded to a holistic view.

It’s incorporating *all* of the student, and not just what they’re coming in for with Mathematics. But then what are they coming in for—in the school or in the classroom, um, with their family, how do they interact with the community. So I kind of try to get more of that—information about the students so I know how to help the student a little bit more. Um, so,—it’s always changing but then right now, it’s more getting the um, getting the family and community involvement uh, so I could help the student.

While Fredrick found his philosophy impactful, he stated that it was difficult to find

enough time to get to know the students. Five to six classes, each with approximately thirty students, prevented ample time for conversation.

**Grace.** Grace's reasons to enter the field of education were three-fold. A combination of uncaring and unvested teachers, tutoring fellow teammates in Algebra and a Mom who initially pursued an education degree laid the foundation for Grace's career choice. Grace described how she had difficulty finding an available job. Less than one month after she quit looking, she received a phone call from a potential school. She was told that it was "a high intervention school." She stated, "I didn't quite know what a high intervention school meant, at that time." She interviewed regardless, and accepted the job. She recalled,

It was very, very challenging, which made me start to reconsider teaching.—After a year there, I left and then went to Belgate, and I knew after the first year in Belgate that I wasn't going to stay there. It was a very rough group.—The administration wasn't very supportive—their expectations and demands never ceased. Unable to find a different job, she returned for year two but that was her final year at that school.

A heart full of warmth was evident as Grace described her teaching philosophy. She stated, "I love the idea of having a welcoming classroom environment." For the younger students, she advocated play-based learning. Grace also taught students in upper-elementary and placed importance on an education that was "brain-based and problem-based." She wanted students to "construct their own learning—through critical thinking" and use "manipulatives to explore concepts." Grace explained the challenges she faced as she tried to implement her student-centered philosophy:

I felt like at those schools we did *some* of that, um, but I felt like it wasn't enough because we always had to teach to the data and teach to the test. So—I kind of lost

my passion there—so that would be a major reason why I left. I love the idea of thematic units where they have lots of arts and crafts incorporated so that the kids are exploring different learning styles and um, uh, just using their learning profiles and, and differentiation—and I felt like at those schools, we weren’t allowed to explore those other options and make the learning um, whole-brained.—It was mostly directed and one-way and it was more—behaviorist-types of teaching model, which I’m not a fan of. Despite these obstacles, Grace felt that her philosophy had favorable effects. She discussed how she employed her beliefs as much as she was able:

I would say that my philosophy *was* impactful because I did try to tweak their curriculum as much as I could to incorporate some of my beliefs on what teaching is, and what it should include.—I think that’s the reason why I achieved the scores that they were looking for—I *didn’t* actually do things *their* way. I thought what they were doing was hindering, um, the children’s progress. So I did, according to my philosophy, and each year that I taught we always met our goals and/or exceeded them. So, I think that’s how my philosophy helped. But, uh, being in the environment, knowing that you’re one voice—against so many others, I wasn’t really going to change things. And if anything, um, being in that environment was starting to affect *me* negatively, so that’s the reason why I had to leave. Even though—I was making an impact, um, overall the politics were just *too* powerful, that they wouldn’t allow me to continue on that route. So that’s the reason why I left.

**Hope.** Full of zeal, Hope entered the teaching arena desirous to make a difference. Hope described her younger self as “really shy.” She reminisced about her Fifth Grade year when her teacher made a connection. This had a profound effect on Hope, and she wanted to one day have

a similar impact on kids. Hope also wanted to strengthen her communication skills. She described how she grew up rather naïve to current events. As a young adult, she saw the world in a different light. She explained,

I became a little um, jaded from finding out things I had never known before or feeling lied to by just everything, you know, media, people in general, about big issues and things of that nature based on other people's worldviews. So I decided I want to be educated so *I* have a brain, and I know how to communicate and I can be an advocate for the underdog: the kids who can't speak yet, or don't understand, or don't know, or feel shy like I was.

Hope served the same school district for eight years across lower and upper elementary grade levels. After several years in general education, she made the switch to Special Education and worked with middle school students. She grounded her philosophy in her belief that “it’s based on teaching kids—no matter what race or ethnicity, or religion they are, giving them a full and appropriate education.” She shared that her exposure to the urban setting taught her to dig deep and discover ways to reach her students:

It helped me to, to get creative, and to research more and to ask more questions of poverty, or, uh, people working around me,--to get, gain an understanding and be able to reach these kids that were given to me for that year. I felt responsible for that.

Hope spoke of the cultural differences that initially kept both her world, and the students’ worlds, apart. She shared,

I just know that the kids that I had in my class at that time and that year—had a limited, um, understanding of what was outside of their little world, and uh, they were really hard to reach. I asked administration to help me out with that, because [they] looked at me



like, you know, like I know *nothing* about them. Which it was *partly* true. I mean, I'm the White, female adult, and they are, these are kids who see people get shot. I had a student who, I remember, a really good kid, but saw an uncle get shot. And, you know, just totally rocked his world. And, you know, of course, no learning to take place for a long time after that. And with these kids, it took *months* to get through and even build *somewhat* of a trust.—They were just *hardened*—they were just really *street smart* kids, just really about, you know, survival.

**Isabelle.** From an early age, Isabelle imagined herself as a teacher. She attributed this aspiration partly to “great teachers” in her life. Neither Isabelle nor her parents spoke English, and she was deeply grateful for her teachers’ guidance. Smiling, she stated, “I think that’s why.—And I loved, you know, helping kids. Especially now, looking back, I knew that I always wanted to help kids—you know, reading and helping them achieve—to say, ‘Hey, I got it!’”

A school in the suburbs was Isabelle’s ideal choice to develop her pedagogy. As was the case with several participants, jobs in this setting were unavailable. When she interviewed with an urban district, she said that “it just felt like a good fit,” and thus began her career as a Special Education teacher. Isabelle reflected on her childhood years and noted that she could relate to her students: “I think because I grew up in maybe a rougher kind of neighborhood, or school.—I relate to these kids.”

Isabelle stated that she always included a “non-threatening environment” in her philosophy. As she gained experience and grew as a teacher, her philosophy expanded to include “nurturing”.

I’m very attentive—I want to meet every need of my students, you know? I want to make sure that they’re successful. Whatever I can do to, in order for them to be

successful.—I listen. I’m very nurturing. I’m very caring. I want to create a caring environment, so when someone walks into my classroom, to know they’re safe. It’s a non-threatening environment. I want them to feel safe, because urban kids don’t feel safe when they walk out of their home. Even in their own home, um, instances shall we say. I don’t know about everybody, but if I went out, I want them to forget about all that when they walk into my room—I want them to feel a sense of calmness in there—and to learn a few things along the way (laughs).

Isabelle described her philosophical impact as positive. In fact, she carried her belief system into her conversations with parents. Intent to establish a rapport with parents, she let them know that she had their child’s best interest at heart. She stated, “I want them to know that I’ve a sense of like, to feel safe with me as parents, as well. Because you know, they’re trusting me with their child.”

**Jill.** Initially, Jill never aspired to teach. As a young adult, she worked in several capacities and consistently showed talent and strength of character.

I was always training new people, and—growing up I was the oldest grandchild—I had a cousin who had [special needs] and—I like children, and you know, just try to make a difference in people’s lives. You know, be an advocate—helping people learn.

Jill’s college was paid for through work. She realized, however, that she did not want to remain on her intended path. She said that she wanted to “just make a difference in people’s lives, and that’s why I became a teacher, and specifically a special education teacher.”

Establishing a relationship was the first response Jill provided as part of her educational philosophy. Once the relationship is established, learning can take place. She stated with conviction,

They have to know you so that they can learn from you—and it takes a while. I think it takes many different strategies and, you know, not just speaking but also activities and the hands-on things. And I think one way is not the way for all kids, and we have to use a bag of tricks, you know, as far as how we treat them and the way we talk to them, and how we teach and opportunities for them to learn in a way that is best for them. And that takes time.

As others in this study, Jill noticed that her philosophy changed with experience. She shared that what is taught in teacher preparatory programs is not necessarily what is learned in the classroom. Additionally, she experienced changes among staff in her school. These transitions added responsibility to her plate, as she had to “train a lot of people—and teach myself” without administrative support. This made it difficult for Jill to invest her time in finding different ways to reach her students.

## **Results**

“Just as a title represents and captures a book, film, or poem’s primary content and essence, so does a code represent and capture a datum’s primary content and essence” (Saldana, 2016, p. 4). In this transcendental phenomenology, I sought to capture the essence of each participant’s lived experience in urban education. A preliminary analysis of data in Atlas.ti revealed initial codes; I used both open and in-vivo coding for this process. As I analyzed the codes, patterns began to emerge. “A pattern is repetitive, regular, or consistent occurrences of action/data that appear more than twice” (Saldana, 2016, p. 5). For purposes of this study, I considered code frequency to assign patterns. Codes that fit the description of a pattern (Saldana, 2016) are listed and defined in Table 4.

Table 4

*Code Book*

Codes	Code Definitions
Administrative support	Support: to consider the feelings and beliefs of employees, namely, teachers; to stand behind, defend—administrators to teachers
Student behavior	Behavior: how an individual acts/interacts with individuals or groups—student responses to other students and authority figures
Community feel	Community: a sense of togetherness; recognition of a common ground and pursuit of a common goal—teachers and students working together with the goal of academic, social and emotional advancement
Emotional distress	Distress: burdensome feeling; feelings of powerlessness to change the situation—teachers' emotions and sense of emotional well-being
Profession	Profession: a career or vocation in which individuals with similar training and expertise work toward a common goal; experiences that take place within the building, i.e., school—teachers' negative experiences with administrative support and preparation to teach in an urban environment impacted the decision to leave the urban educational setting
Little trust	Trust: a feeling or belief that someone can be counted on; dependability—teacher to teacher, teacher to administrator(s), teacher to student, student to teacher
Politics	Politics: requirements set forth by individuals or groups with an outside affiliation to schools—insufficient funding, lack of support staff, class size/caseload, state-mandated/standardized tests and student attendance/tardiness impacted teachers' decision to leave the urban educational setting
Parental support	Support: to stand behind, defend—parents to teachers; parents to students
Low socioeconomic status	Socioeconomic: income and problems/attitudes that accompany

	income—low status for the majority of students teachers served
Culture	Behaviors or beliefs commonly expressed by an identified group
Social skills	Social: inter- and intrapersonal communication between or among individuals—student ineptness
Funding	Fund: monies allocated to a school—state funding
State-mandated/standardized tests	Mandate: requirements of the state—states require students to take standardized tests Standardize: uniform—students measured by the same standard, regardless of intellectual ability, funding or socioeconomic status
Class size/caseload	Size: the amount of students per classroom, including the teacher to student ratio as well as physical size of the classroom—large class size Caseload: the amount of students a special education teacher is required to see daily—large caseload
Student attendance/tardiness	Attendance: the number of times an individual is present for a required event or activity—low student attendance Tardy: not present for a required event or activity by a designated time—frequent student tardiness
Misalignment of educational philosophy	Align: to coincide; to be in agreement Philosophy: a belief of how something should occur—educational philosophies of most teachers did not align with workplace experiences
Lack of professionalism	Professional: actions of individuals in accordance with a career; mannerisms—lack among staff members and administrators
Lack of teacher preparation	Preparation: getting ready to carry out duties—teachers felt underprepared to teach in an urban setting
Structure	Structure: a system set in place; procedures and expectations in which individuals in an organization adhere—some teachers noticed an absence of structure in the schools

Trauma	Trauma: an incident occurring as an isolated event or series of events over time that negatively alter the affected individual's emotional state—teachers reported students as victims and/or witnesses of trauma
Survival	Survival: actions taken to ensure safety and well-being; assurance sought to make sure basic needs are met (food, safety, shelter)—Teachers reported students as having a survival mindset
Self-efficacy	Self-efficacy: having a sense of confidence in one's abilities—teachers' reports of low self-efficacy with regard to effectiveness
Relevance to students' lives	Relevance: the manner in which something pertains to an individual; the level of importance something holds—teachers sought to make education relevant to students' lives

I used Atlas.ti to analyze each code again, and categorized codes similar in meaning. Further analysis allowed me to see that each category fell under one of two emerging themes. Corresponding subthemes also emerged. Both themes and subthemes helped answer the research questions that guided this study and are depicted in Table 5. Open-codes providing the foundation for the emergent themes are depicted in Table 6.

Table 5

*Emerging Themes with Subthemes*

Identified Themes	Subthemes
<i>Professional Reasons for Leaving the Urban Educational Setting</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insufficient Administrative Support</li> <li>• Insufficient Preparation to Teach in an Urban Environment</li> </ul>
<i>Cultural Reasons for Leaving the Urban Educational Setting</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student Behavior</li> <li>• Insufficient Parental Support and Involvement</li> </ul>

*Political Reasons for Leaving the Urban Educational Setting*

- Insufficient Funding to Meet Students' Needs
- Insufficient Number of Support Staff
- State-Mandated/Standardized Tests
- Class Size/Caseload
- Student Attendance/Tardiness

Table 6

*Open Codes and Themes*

Open Codes	Frequency of Open Codes Across Data Sets	Themes
Administrative support	85	Professional reasons for leaving the urban educational setting
Community feel	15	
Emotional distress	21	
Misalignment of educational philosophy	8	
Lack of professionalism	7	
Lack of structure	3	
Trauma	18	
Survival	7	
Self-efficacy	20	
Relevance to students' lives	8	
Insufficient preparation to teach in an urban environment	22	
Teacher education programs	22	
Student attendance/tardiness	5	
Student behavior	33	Cultural reasons for leaving the urban educational setting
Little trust	33	
Social skills	22	
Insufficient parental support and involvement	19	
Politics	52	Political reasons for leaving the urban educational setting
Low socioeconomic status	8	

Insufficient funding to meet students' needs	25
State-mandated/standardized tests	15
Class size/caseload	11
Student attendance/tardiness	5

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## Theme Development

Open codes that accompanied the first theme, professional reasons for leaving the urban education setting, included: administrative support, student behavior, community feel, emotional distress, misalignment of educational philosophy, lack of professionalism, lack of structure, trauma, survival, self-efficacy, relevance to students' lives, lack of teacher preparation, teacher education programs and student attendance/tardiness. Subthemes were assigned based on frequency of open code occurrence. Hence, the subthemes for theme one included: insufficient administrative support, and insufficient preparation to teach in an urban environment/teacher education programs. I incorporated the open codes of student behavior and insufficient parental support and involvement as subthemes of the second theme, cultural factors for leaving the urban educational setting. Open codes included as subthemes under the third theme of political reasons for leaving the urban educational setting are insufficient funding to meet students' needs, insufficient number of support staff, state-mandated/standardized tests, class size/caseload and student attendance/tardiness. The open code of low-socioeconomic status was linked to the subtheme of insufficient funding to meet students' needs. The three main themes that emerged from this study were (a) professional reasons for leaving the urban educational setting, (b) cultural reasons for leaving the urban educational setting and (c) political reasons for leaving the urban educational setting.



### **Theme One: Professional Reasons for Leaving the Urban Educational Setting**

The first main theme that emerged from this study pertained to professional reasons behind participants' decisions to leave the urban educational setting within metropolitan Detroit. By professional reasons, this specifically relates to experiences that take place within a participant's school. Insufficient administrative support along with insufficient preparation to teach in an urban environment/teacher education programs were identified as subthemes.

**Insufficient administrative support.** Participants referred to feelings of insufficient administrative support with several examples. Experiences included, but were not limited to, insufficient support with student behavior, parental communication, and implementation of accommodations and procedures.

Grace described her experiences, and how they negatively affected her at a professional level, thus creating a shift in how she viewed the educational system:

If you complained about a child's behavior, and certain things that they did, [they] would attempt to be supportive by providing um, relief, uh, for a few times. But after that, they expected you to handle it on your own...And because they didn't provide me with enough support, I felt like I was handling one drama after another, with very limited amounts of time to actually *teach* the other children. So, um, that is something that made me kind of infuriated with the profession because they're killing your passion by not allowing you to do what you're passionate about. Instead, they were making you tackle issues that you weren't taught or prepared for.

Amy experienced a similar frustration with student behavior and lack of administrative support. She held to her belief that excuses prevented positive change in her classroom:

You get one or two big behavior issues and it spreads through the class. And, um, not

holding kids accountable for their actions, and then the rest of the class *seeing* that they're not being held accountable. I mean, it creates—chaos—It's hard to run a classroom when they know they can't be punished for bad behavior. Not that they weren't punished, but it, I think sometimes that it wasn't a severe enough punishment or they weren't being held accountable *enough*.

Amy gave an example of a time her cell phone was stolen, yet nothing was done when the student eventually admitted to theft. She also indicated feelings of betrayal on a couple of occasions, when her boss would side with the parents just to appease them. This lack of support led to Amy's lack of trust with administration.

When it came to, um, anything like a disagreement or a confrontation between myself and a parent, or myself and a student, I didn't feel like I could trust them with making a good decision. I mean I hate to say that but that's how I felt.

Jill continually found herself up against a wall. Her efforts to help her students find success returned almost void. She attributed this to a lack of top-down communication from administration, which created a discrepancy among procedures. Inconsistent implementation of accommodations as well as disregard for grading processes resulted, thus creating a rift between Jill and some of the general education teachers. Jill searched for support from administration, only to hear the words, "Well, communicate, Jill. Communicate with your co-teachers." The frustration Jill felt was evident as she shared her inner-dialogue:

Um, I think (sighs)—At that point, you know, when it comes to grading and curriculum, no, I don't think *that's* my responsibility. They should explain to these teachers that they need to follow the accommodations and grade accordingly.—I just feel like everything was put on *me*.— I just didn't want to fight anymore with it.

The mission of Teach for America was what attracted Elizabeth to education, but the practices of TFA were part of her reason for leaving. Although she described leaders in TFA as “supportive,” she stated that “they weren’t very helpful” and gave the example of teaching high school yet having an overseer who “taught kindergarten.” Again, Elizabeth tried but failed to find the positive when she mentioned TFA connected her to a local university. She stated, “I had some people, like coming to observe me. To be honest, they were also not helpful. ‘Cuz like, in some ways, uh—but in other ways they were.” When asked for examples, she referred to topics of classroom engagement and attendance. She recalled,

In the very beginning, in the first few months—when I was kind of struggling—one of the guys came in and was like, ‘Oh well, you know, maybe don’t sweat it too much.—I don’t know what to tell you because—I don’t know what you would do in this situation with some of these kids.—I just don’t know what you would do, how you would motivate them, because they’re just severely unmotivated.’ And he’s like, ‘At least your classroom isn’t as bad as this guy’s class over here.’ I’m like, okay, well, that doesn’t help.—So they were kind of at a loss as far as what to do with uh, some of the attitudes and, and behaviors.

Beth’s comments revealed her frustration with administrative decisions regarding discipline and parental communication. She explained,

It was the second-guessing *everything* we did as far as disciplining, though [she] couldn’t discipline *anybody* to save her life. Um, it was the way that she...went from being the principal that would support us and back us in front of a parent to the person who would backstab us to the parent, to appease the parent, at the teachers’ expense.

Fredrick's example of a lack of administrative support indicated hypocrisy on the part of administration. He described a time in which a student had disrupted classroom instruction with spit wads. He sent the student to the school's office, only to find that the administrator had the student return to class. Fredrick, holding tight to his principles, sent the student back to the office. Administration would not support Fredrick by talking with the student, calling the parent or giving any type of consequence. Instead, Fredrick was told that he should call the parent, even if it was in the middle of class. This seemed hypocritical to Fredrick, as in his eyes, administration should have supported high standards for student behavior and a protection of classroom instruction.

Elizabeth also expressed a lack of administrative support with regard to communication from the school's leadership. She described a lack of professionalism and last-minute decisions:

They're understaffed, right? And so you get stuff thrown on you last minute, and plans change and it really screws with your, with your lesson. And you're like, 'Well...you couldn't let me know there was like a whole school-wide assembly before, ten minutes ago?' And that...it's an *Honors* assembly? And 40 of the kids that did not get honors, that you don't want in that auditorium, are about to come into my room right now, for 2 hours? And sit with me?...I just found this out 7 minutes ago and now they're coming in my room...And I had like a *test* planned today. And had *no idea* any of this stuff was happening. It was just like, could you just treat this with a little bit more respect?

**Student Attendance/Tardiness.** Student attendance/tardiness was a characteristic that negatively affected teachers' experiences within the urban setting of metropolitan Detroit. Amy described how an administrative lack of reinforcement on attendance policies negatively impacted classroom routine and curriculum:

Finally getting into that routine and then having, you know, a handful of kids absent so often, and then having to backtrack and get them caught up and it just, it disrupts the classroom. Even if it doesn't disrupt that specific day, overall through the course of, you know, a unit or a lesson that spreads over several days, I mean you're talking about four or five kids absent, and then now you have to figure out how to backtrack and teach them what they've missed.—To do any kind of big projects that—involve a lot of different aspects of learning. It was hard, because first of all, now we make the excuse that they don't have the money for materials. The school doesn't have the money to provide those materials. The kids aren't there to learn half of it. Um, it just, it wasn't just one specific thing, it's a bunch of things all working together.

Elizabeth, too, often found that student “attendance fluctuated a lot.” This made it difficult to meet the academic needs of her students. She explained,

I had a couple classes where I would have 39 showing up constantly. And then, a couple where we'd like, you know, 25 most of the time. And then, one day a week it'd be, one day like every couple weeks you'd get like 32, and you're like, seven—okay, these guys, I'd see these kids like once a month.—And the other days it'd be like 15, 15, 15 (laughs). You know? So. It was great (sarcasm). That was such a challenge, and I don't even know that I ever came up with the right answer for that. Um, you know I did everything I could to make the class engaging. Um, you know and a lot of times I'd sit down and I'd talk with them like, ‘Why are you missing school?’ You know? And a lot of times it was little stuff, like, ‘Well, my aunt got sick, and my mom decided to move to the other side of the city with her, and the bus is gonna be taking me this long to get there and you know, and I, I just went to Brookport schools for a few weeks’ (laughs). You know what I mean? ‘I

thought I was going to move schools. I kept thinking I was going to move schools.’ Um, or just like, you know, my, ‘My brother was sick so I had to stay home with him for a week.’ Or, you know, or, just, what do you (sighs/laughs)—So when it came to the classroom, yeah, I mean, how do you track progress? Um, it was difficult. You know? I mean, a-, aside from the fact, like, so I mean, like, you know I did things: I made a website, I put all the notes up there, put the homework up there, put the due dates up there, put it literally on the website so they could get it offline. I even had a thing where they could like, you know, send it to me via their phones if they wanted to, you know, take pictures—I tried to make it as accessible as possible where they could get their work and send it back. I was posting You-Tube videos if they were missing class.—I had like a bin in the back of the classroom with all the hard copies. You know? I tried really hard to keep a hand written note thing up in the classroom. But that just kept getting gone. Um (laughs) so, um, but, you know, they gotta do, they gotta look at it. Like, I tell them that it’s available so much, but, if they don’t *care*, you know? And then, grading was hard too, right? Because then you, you deal with all these absences, and, you end up with a lot of kids missing the tests and, a lot of kids’ll be, yeah. It just, (sighs) I don’t know. When a certain percentage of your class just isn’t showing up and then your grades become, right? Like who’s been here, and doing what? You know what I mean? Like, if you’ve been here and you’re failing everything, you’re not, not paying attention. Like, the grading becomes weird, right? Because there’s this pressure that if a student is showing up every day and trying, right? Especially if they have a learning deficit. Um, do you really fail them? You know? Um, yeah, so, this, it was just really difficult. Um, I never came up with exact answers.

### **Insufficient preparation to teach in an urban environment/teacher education**

**programs.** Each participant felt inadequately prepared to teach in the urban setting. Although there was agreement that some learning occurred on the job, they believed colleges and universities should have offered more training. Isabelle stated, “Maybe they should have classes to prepare teachers much more, not to be culturally shocked when they graduate.” She reflected on her own teacher preparatory program,

I don’t think I was that prepared. Like you really have to experience it to really know what you’re going to do. You know, you’re going to keep going, or you’re going to go quit and just do something else...I can’t recall, maybe it’s because when I was in my undergrad doing all these classes I was like, “Oh, this is going to be so perfect! This is going to be a dream. I’m going to be teaching in a perfect class and I’m going to have endless supplies and I’m going to have great parents!” Well, no, no. It’s not reality. You know?...I think there should be a little bit more. I think they should make a whole *class* maybe, on urban, how to, you know, how to, how an urban classroom is. So you won’t be shocked when you go into the world, because you don’t know where you’re going to end up. And you know, there’s a good chance you may work in an urban, you know, urban setting.

Hope reflected on her training, or lack thereof, for teaching in an urban setting. She shared her hopes and desires,

I jumped into something that I could have been trained more, a lot more, if I knew, you know, more about it. And yet, it was not something I had planned to do or I would, thinking about at the time...I think it was overall a good experience to have, even as hard as it was. But it showed me too that...you need a lot of um, a lot of education on

multicultural backgrounds and you need to really be able to, to live, almost, in their community, to understand and...to know how to better teach them and reach them.

***Emotional distress.*** The majority of participants discussed the effect stress had on their decision to leave the urban setting. Grace's stress revolved around a lack of support for extraneous student behavior, whether in the form of administrative or support staff, a lack of professionalism among staff members, a lack of guidance from her mentor and a lack of trust for the majority of co-workers. This daily struggle left her feeling as though "it was constantly a battle of emotional distress," thus affecting her outlook and physical health.

When Beth talked about her angst over the decision to leave or stay, she stated that she decided, "at most staying one more year" and "even if I couldn't find another job, I was leaving." She reached the point where she was willing to settle for something outside of education, and did not care what that position would entail. She stated, "It was *killing* me. And, so, I mean, I was so upset and so *stressed* about something that I had *no* control over. It's insane." When she reflected on her lost passion, Beth stated, "It just kind of deteriorated and I hate that it happened, but it was either like, that or my sanity." Beth happily shared that her passion "completely rekindled itself" and felt she was "making more of a difference" in her new setting.

Amy indicated that her decision to leave was not caused by one factor, but several, as noted in her comment: "It wasn't just one specific thing. It's a bunch of things all working together." Her stress brought her to the point where she began to question her pedagogy, her motivation, and her effectiveness. When she discussed whether she felt effective, she replied,

Overall, no. Um, I felt like no matter what I did everything was against me. I had a *really* bad school year the year before I left. And, um, I don't know, it seemed to carry over into that last year I was there, and—it was hard to get over it, I guess? I don't know



if that's the right word. But—there were a lot of things that I felt where no matter how hard I tried I wasn't making any difference at all, and—I don't know, I just didn't feel like I was doing what I wanted to do. And, it got me to a point where I was putting less effort into my job, and, um, not caring as much, and then I thought having the summer off would be a nice break and I'd come back the next year refreshed and ready to go, and it didn't work. It didn't happen. Um, the next year I came back and almost right away I felt that instant stress again. Um, and I did, you know, try to look past it, and I was like—well, maybe if I go back to how I was my first year and really just push, and, um, so I tried some different things, and I put a lot of time into my class, and, things like that, and by mid-year I could tell it wasn't really going anywhere and, at that point I decided I needed to look for something else.--It was having a huge effect on my family at home, too. Um, I'd go home completely stressed out and take it out on my family. And, um, my husband and I talked about it several times, and we both agreed that it wasn't worth me carrying it over into my family, and that even if I left teaching altogether, it was better than going back.—Now that I'm not in that setting and dealing with [it]—my stress is so much lower.

The demands of the teaching profession caused Fredrick's doctor to suggest he cut back on stress. In fact, Fredrick found that leaving his position was worth taking the pay cut because of the stress, and it afforded him more time with his family.

***Self-efficacy.*** Teachers questioned and reflected on their level of effectiveness in the urban setting.

Catherine compared her effectiveness to baseball:

I felt effective, um, but never enough. It's sort of like a batting average thing, right? So baseball players that bat, get a hit a third of the time, a fourth, you know? Just under half of the time they're phenomenal hitters. Um, and, then maybe, those results are also okay in education but you want every single one of your children to thrive. Um, so, I felt effective but was always aware, um, of the mountain I was trying to move. And then even if students were successful during your time with me when I sent them off to high school that didn't necessarily continue. Um, so, individually successful.

Regarding effectiveness, Hope recalled being able to reach a couple of students, and considered that a triumph. She recognized her abilities as well her limits as she stated,

I would have liked to...reach more...I don't know if anybody was, would've been able to do it either...Maybe they would have respected a male better and somebody who was Black and was uh, on the streets like they were, and then had a testimony to say how they got out. And maybe they would have listened. I don't know...Teaching children to become responsible citizens who can one day give back, and have the, the potential to become all that they can and more. I mean, if they became something more than they were the year before me, I have peace about that.

Teary-eyed, Elizabeth admitted that feelings of effectiveness was "another thing I struggled with." She shared,

I always wondered, you know, obviously in a setting like this, if your, your goal is to get them all out of the situation they're in, or get them to the point where they can get themselves out of that situation—like you don't see the returns right away. You know? Um, I had a lot of connections that I made...They were learning and...they showed growth like on test scores (laughs), and, and I saw them improving over the course of the

years. But, um, I always wanted to see more, you know? So I was like, what can I do to get more? Um, and, yeah, I mean, in a lot of ways I felt I was constantly beating myself up. Like, okay, 'I need to do this better, I need to do this better.' And uh, so I think if you were to ask me while I was in it and I were to be honest, I'd be like, 'Man, I don't feel effective.' But, um, there were days when I really did and I think when the end of it all I really saw, I think I was just hard on myself (laughs). And also it's just like...when you're teaching in that setting it's like you're never effective enough. So, like you could *always* be doing more. So, yeah. I mean, uh, you know, comparatively to what I had seen, I thought I was effective, you know? But, to what I wanted it to be? No.

As Fredrick shared his feelings on self-efficacy, he placed the blame on himself. He described,

There were times that I felt ineffective...I think it's more of just, it was the way I was presenting [it]...that the students would feel lost and then just uh, disengaged with the lesson. So I just, you know, um, felt that I wasn't doing as well as I can.

## **Theme Two: Cultural Reasons for Leaving the Urban Educational Setting**

The second overarching theme that emerged pertained to cultural reasons for leaving the urban educational setting. By cultural reasons, this specifically relates to behaviors or beliefs commonly expressed by an identified group. Participants expressed efforts to juxtapose their knowledge and efforts with the academic and social needs of the students. However, such efforts were outweighed by negative influences of student behavior, and insufficient parental support and involvement.

**Student Behavior.** The challenges many urban students brought to each classroom were manifested through behavior. Examples that left teachers frustrated and feeling helpless were

common throughout most interviews. Insufficient opportunities for students to work collaboratively and experience more project-based learning, in Beth's opinion, were a result of poor behavior among students. Looking back, she wished she could have incorporated "cool activities that weren't just worksheets and stuff like that" to fuel students' passion for learning. Instead, she felt that she was "always stopping", interrupted by students' poor behavior choices.

Hope shared how student behavior affected daily lessons:

Uh, a lot of, the, the challenges I had were with, um, motivation, discipline—some had no structure, many had no structure. Um, they were very vocal, and so I had to really be on top of my game as far as having activities worth them wanting to even do. And so I had to do a lot of kinesthetic type activities, um, because they were very high energy. And so, I just really—had to get to *know* them, 'cuz I knew that they didn't care. They didn't care about learning. They cared about getting their basic needs met. They cared about—what's going on in their life.

Behavior was an obstacle that left Amy feeling frustrated and discouraged, as indicated in the following comments:

Behavior is a big one...it was either they couldn't be expected to behave the way they were supposed to because of a disability, or...because of their family life or their home environment, or...whatever the case may be, but, it's still an excuse. I mean, you can't, I don't know, I just feel like if you're constantly making excuses for 'em they're always going to look for those excuses.

David described challenges some of his students faced as "god-awful situations." He shared, "I didn't feel like at that point I could provide the services and the help that this group of kids needed. Um, I tried very hard and it was a big struggle with it." David shared that he started

to internalize the problems his students faced and how the effects “almost *destroyed* me.” He described the manifestation of behaviors in his classroom:

Uh, fighting on a, semi-regular basis. I’d probably say there was a fight once a week.

***Little trust.*** As Beth described student behavior, she found it difficult to trust the students to utilize hands-on learning methods. Beth further described the level of trust with her students. She shared,

So as far as them trusting *me*, I think some did. I’m sure many didn’t. But as far as me trusting them, I think it’s even more, way fewer kids that I trusted, for anything. I mean, they were stealing crayons, they were stealing game pieces, they were stealing books.

Fredrick described student trust as something that had to be established each school year. He indicated that for the most part, he trusted his students. However, it took time to get his students to trust him. He explained, “Once that relationship is built...the trust comes with that.”

Hope noticed that it took “months” to break through the barriers and “build *somewhat* of a trust...They’re just *hardened*...some kids were fostered...I had one student who had *multiple disorders*...I had a lot of kids who, too, came from single parent homes, and, or...they may have been in gangs or they were just really *street smart* kids, just really about, you know, survival.

***Social skills.*** There was (*sic*) some kids who—not behavior issues in a traditional sense of being just like outwardly defiant, but having no sense of what they are doing and why they are there, so they just, their behaviors were not—they didn’t know how to behave in a classroom.—Um, you know, and they just, became very much, they are the center of their universe and, they are going to deal with the world in the way *they* see fit and not recognize at some level that they are in a classroom setting and there are other people around them that they have to deal

with...Those would be the major things—a lot of fighting, a lot of people who had *no concept* as to what they were *doing* in school.

Grace described her negative experiences with students' social skills as follows:

The children have *high* needs. And, not academic needs, but they have high, um, needs in the realm of social skills that they lack. Because of their socioeconomic status, the degree of poverty there, the degree of neglect—the amount of uh, issues that the children brought to the table, it made it very conflicting and difficult to teach academic concepts. Because the children weren't prepared or ready to learn them because of their uh, circumstances at home, so that made it complicated.

**Insufficient Parental Support and Involvement.** Grace stated disappointment with the lack of parental support for her second special needs student. She described him as “very, very aggressive—suspended *six times*—At the end of the year he decided to grab my hand and bite me as hard as he could” The parental support started strong, but faded by mid-year. Grace did not have any formal training in Special Education.

David expressed,

I'd like to see some more parent accountability for it so like, you know, when the kids come in they are at least a little prepared: they know how to hold a pencil, they know how to do certain things.

Amy typically reached out to parents for support with their child's behavior, or to communicate missing assignments and other academic concerns. Parents devoid of transportation found it difficult to physically show support in their child's school. If communication was limited to a phone call, Amy often encountered numbers that did not work.

At times, when a working number was found, the parents would show their support. Other times, she was blamed:

‘Well, why didn’t I find out about this sooner? You know my kid’s missing 20 assignments. Why am I just now hearing about it?’ Which seems like a legitimate response, except that the reason they didn’t hear anything up to that point is because it took so long to get a working number, or to actually get a hold of a parent once you got that working number. Um, sent letters home several times, um, with a student—never got a response. Um, and then by the time you get a response it’s usually right around the report card time. They want to be able to get their kid caught up with *everything* from the whole card marking the last week before report cards. Or, they get the report card and be so shocked by the grade that they call, you know, yelling at me, ‘Well, why did you give my kid that grade? Why didn’t I know about this?’ But you know, they don’t show up for conferences, can’t get a hold of them by phone or, by e-mail, or by *letter* home—I mean, you try all the things and, time after time after time of not getting that response, eventually it seems like a waste of time. And to be honest with you, my last year there—I didn’t bother with the kids that I knew I wouldn’t get a response from the parents.

Amy also explained that parental involvement which consists of the parents and teachers communicating and working together for the students’ best interest promotes a community feel.

Catherine tackled the topic of parental involvement from a unique perspective:

Sometimes we say you know, ‘These parents don’t care about their kids’ education.’ It’s like, ‘Well, so, I had pretty good experiences in school as a kid and I’m a teacher so I’m used to being in school, so I’m not really scared of schools. I’m not really intimidated by

administrators. I'm not really intimidated by my teacher peers. So I'm willing to go up to my daughter's school. I'm willing to ask questions. I have the background in education to support them with their homework at home.' Um, those I think, those are the signifiers that we look for, like a parent who shows interest and supports in homework and does some extra stuff around the school. Um, but those are not, those are not the *only* indicators of caring deeply about your child and wanting your child to be successful. Um, they're just the ones that most of us as teachers have experience in and what we want from parents. But um, but sometimes getting your kid dressed and to school, which might mean a mile and a half walk through foot-deep snow, which sounds like sort of the old, 'My grandpa used to walk to school uphill' (chuckles). No joke, but it's true. I mean, there are families, lots of families without transportation. There are lots of families, for whom I was um, most recently, in southwest Detroit where we had a lot of immigrant families and so walking into an institution of the state could be seen as a threat for somebody who is not documented. And so, you're not necessarily gonna get that person to come into your classroom and sign paperwork. Um, that doesn't mean that they don't love their child and believe in the power of a child's education to change his or her circumstances.

Beth compared the perceived non-urban home lives of her current students with those in her urban experience. She shared,

I can't think of one that has a parent out of the picture. So even if they're not married any more, there's still family, you know, trying for that kid, whereas at the other place, it was rare to have a dad in the picture, *at all, ever*. It's just different dynamics completely...it's much *harder* on the urban kids because they don't have that role model, they don't have



that home support. They might not even have a stable adult *at all* living with them. So, school is only a small part of it. I think the home life mattered way more than the school setting.

Isabelle stated that while students in non-urban schools face challenges, she felt that there was a greater amount of challenges faced by students in the urban setting. She expressed the need for parental support:

It's up to the parents—to follow through. Like, making sure they do their homework, making sure that, um, they are fed, making sure that they are warm, that they have clothes, that they have running water in their house. You know? These are the urban kids that, that's what they deal with.—It's just more challenging to work in an urban setting.

Isabelle also discussed how the lack of parental involvement created a need for more structure at her school:

They don't show up, parents. And that's one thing: I think parent involvement is *key*. You know? Um, that's like I said, a little more structure, because an urban setting is like, you know, they see things in their life so they bring it to school, so they come with a little bit of, I wouldn't say attitude, but they come with a story. And it's very easy emotions to get, like—excited, you know, because they've seen, experienced so much in their life than in a non-urban setting. So there can be a lot of drama, shall we say? And I think they should have more structure, like how to handle things. The school. That's my opinion.

### **Theme Three: Political Reasons for Leaving the Urban Educational Setting**

In addition to stressors felt at the professional level, teachers were also impacted from a political level. By political reasons, this specifically relates to requirements set forth by

individuals or groups with an outside affiliation to schools. The two biggest grievances at this level pertained to insufficient funding and insufficient number of support staff. Both class size/caseload and the number of trained individuals to accommodate the class size/caseload were negatively impacted by insufficient funding. Participants also found such negative impacts to hinder preparation for state-mandated/standardized tests. In addition, participants often stated that student attendance/tardiness had a negative impact on instruction and achievement.

**Insufficient Funding to Meet Students' Needs.** In order for schools to function, money is necessary. The amount of funds schools receive determines employee salaries and resources. Money also plays a part in class size of general education teachers and caseload for Special Education teachers. Additionally, monies received are allocated for basic building needs. However, the amount of funds schools receive are based on demographics and student enrollment. This greatly affects how funds are distributed, and is deeply felt in urban settings.

Amy described the vicious cycle that urban schools experience:

I feel like [they] face more of a struggle because they're already dealing with economic hardship, and then, on top of it, to have the school that they're going to, also dealing with that—I mean, just not having the resources alone. Um, schools can't afford to hire the staff they need, or um, get the resources they need to be able to provide good learning experiences. I think education is affected overall, not just the urban schools, but as a whole. Um, I just think they get the worst of it.—Sometimes I feel like money drives their decisions. Um, if they can get a body in a chair and they're getting money for it, um, they don't care about the repercussions of those actions, which is why they have classroom sizes of 30 or more, um, which is a disservice to the students. When you have that many kids you can't possibly reach each kid. Um, but, to survive as a school, you

have to have the money, and in order to get the money, you have to have the students.

An example of funds having a drastic effect is in Catherine's story. She was moved four times in five years before she was reassigned to a middle school setting where she remained for 15 years. Although she found her final assignment a positive experience, Catherine initially described the move as "traumatic" for the students at both levels as well as herself:

You figure by that point of November you've all really bonded.—The little guys need that continuity and stability. And um, and then I guess no less, the Middle-schoolers, too, so they lost the teacher with whom they had been bonding and all of a sudden I walk in that new place. So, it was a *huge* shift in grade level and content expectations for me. Um, but, but I think very emotionally troubling for the kids on both ends. The first and second graders ended up being split up among other classrooms. Um, and then the middle schoolers kept the same schedule but they had me instead of the teacher they'd had before.

This type of activity was common within the school district, and witnessed by Catherine as early as the late 1990's. She explained,

Just when there's budget cuts or count day shifts. Um, when schools are closed and people start bumping to find positions. Um, people quit. But yeah, there was a lot of um, I would call, not-strategic personnel changes.

Jill stated,

If you don't live in a certain community, it directly affects—the quality of education you get. And, it really saddens me because I feel like if you live in a poorer neighborhood, whether you're African American, White, Asian, whoever you are, you don't have the opportunities that other students do, when there's more of a tax-base, when there's more

money, and I don't think that's fair, you know? Where you're born into defines the kind of education you receive.

From a political standpoint, most participants expressed a need for equity among districts. The distaste for the effects a shortage of funds had on building conditions, resources, classroom furniture, extracurricular course offerings, class size, caseload, support staff and salary was evident in the interviews.

Elizabeth was always aware of the inequity of funding due to her personal educational experience. Her experience as a teacher darkened the cloud that hung over her beliefs:

I already knew the zip code thing was a difference, because I saw, you know, in my own life. So, um, if anything it just showed me it was way more stark. Um, so that was one thing. And it really got me, instead of just being aware, I got really upset. I, you know? I got really angry, over the fact that um, you know, the conditions are so frickin' (*sic*) different. You know? And it's *unfair*. These kids grow up with not much at home. This is a *public* education.—You would *think* that a school that is funded by the U.S.

Government, you know, would be the same if not *better*, for students who come from backgrounds like this. You know? And it's, it's *so* different. Like our roof is leaking, right? At this school. There's not enough toilet paper. We got (*sic*) like one crappy copier for the teachers. And I literally showed up my first time and, you know, it was just chalk and a chalkboard, you know, which is, um, which is okay but it's like, okay, we don't have any calculators. The kids don't have calculators. There's no, um, not enough seats (chuckles). Some are broken. You know, and then you go to a Robotics competition, out, in, just across Oak Street, and it's like, brilliant gym and like, what do those kids think?

You know? Clearly, ‘I’m not worth it.’ Right? This is public school, too...And that, like just killed my soul to see and just seemed so, so unfair.

Participants tried to make the best of each situation they faced. Even though a lack of resources was common among urban schools, teachers rose to the challenge. Jill commented on the camaraderie of co-workers she experienced,

We don’t have the resources that public schools have. And, I think, you know, we try to be creative and we deal with what we do have—and share and work together to, to provide the best education we can for the students, even though, you know, we’re all in the same situation with limited resources and/or funding.

Fredrick named funding as the first thing needed to improve urban education. He referred to an affluent school district that had more resources for its students. Knowing that he couldn’t change the situation, Fredrick made the best use out of the resources he did have, and focused more on establishing relationships with his students in order to achieve academic growth.

When asked what changes Catherine felt were needed in order for urban education to be effective, she stated,

It might start sounding a big revolutionary, but...I think we can’t have equity of funding. We have to have *inequity* of funding. The students who need more, need more. Um, so, if you’re coming from a uh, a background that does not inherently provide some of the readiness or support systems that are essential to successfully learning...if we were really committed to leveling the playing field, we would provide those resources to those students...I think the highest quality teachers should be placed with the students most in need...Right now our system is built to, uh, encourage good teachers through high

salaries and calm working environments. They go places where the kids are probably gonna (*sic*) be fine whether they've got a teacher in front of them or not... So then what's left in our urban centers, often, are new teachers who don't yet (laughs) know what they're doing, but when they figure it out they move to a higher pay (chuckles), a more stable environment... So, I think um, more resources for the students who need it, and a system that incentivizes the best teachers for the students who most desperately need them.

**Insufficient number of support staff.** Amy believed that her administration wanted to provide support staff for students' academic needs, but the shortage of staff members created inconsistency. She explained,

Any time anybody was needed for anything else, [they] were pulled in other directions, just doing other things.—It goes right back to the bandwagon thing. You know you jump on this idea and put all your resources into that basket and then everything else suffers.

Beth shared similar views to those of Amy's. The lack of consistency made it difficult to count on additional help for struggling students. The ability to utilize aides as she saw fit was not an option. She shared,

We had aides but—not in a productive manner.—They were pulled for all sorts of random stuff.—It would have been nice to have what we used to have where we would have an aide that would come in and *stay* in the classroom, and the teacher would tell them, you know, work with this group of kids on this concept, kind of thing.—We did not have aides for anything we needed, or thought, you know, would be helpful.

Jill felt that in order for students with special needs to find success, more support staff as well as resources were necessary. This would lighten the load placed on the Special Education

teacher, which would allow high-quality, effective teaching. In addition, Jill believed that new teachers deserved more support. She stated, “New teachers need support, not just training after school. That’s not support. I’m talking about in the school, for them and the students.” With a caseload of 21 students, “no paraprofessionals and no assistance” Jill spoke from experience.

The only consistent support Grace received was in the form of RtI, which consisted of one hour daily. Either the Special Education Director or Special Education teachers would assist with the two students, but only if they were available. Isabelle was presented with a caseload of close to 30 students without any paraprofessionals.

**State-Mandated/Standardized Tests.** Several participants (Amy, Beth, David, Elizabeth and Grace) shared the negative effect standardized tests had on their teaching experiences. Amy admitted that she only has two settings to compare her views and did not want to cast judgment. She did share, however, that standardized tests in her urban experience altered her view of the educational system, whereas “it’s not even an issue” in her current, non-urban setting. She explained,

I don’t know, I feel like teachers being held accountable for things that they can’t control. Um, not so much where I am at now and I don’t know if that’s an urban thing or if that’s across the board, but um, it just made me feel like it’s a completely biased system, or unfair system, because if we’re gonna constantly make excuses for ‘em and yet we’re being held accountable for what happens with them so, I don’t know.

The implementation of standardized tests left Beth with a “bad taste.” When asked how her view of the educational system altered, she stated,

Well, I realized what a game it was. I realized what a pathetic, political game it’s become in this country, where test scores and numbers—somehow are representing the

complicated beings that we are, and a poor tester is a failure, even if they're not. Even if they've learned, even if they can apply it in their life, it doesn't matter. And, unfortunately, it's across this whole country where test scores matter the most and morale doesn't, and, the true picture of lifelong learning doesn't because [they] care about your test scores and how did you do compared to last year and compared to the other, you know, schools that you're competing with—And I, you know, being a Mom, hate that my kids would have to partake in such a, a game actually, where education takes second to their test scores. So, I don't know. I didn't like it. I still don't—But, it's still the reality of this country, but nothing changes.

Elizabeth believed that the emphasis on test scores created a “robot mentality” within the school system. She discussed that in order to make AYP, high school students had double-doses of Math and Reading. Though Elizabeth was not against literature-based education, she “didn't like seeing education stripped down to the bare bones—especially for kids—that didn't have enough options. They didn't have enough outlets.” She continued,

It's just like, 'Go here, get this,' and it was constantly focused on those test scores...But we're dealing with these issues...That's always what's underlying, like the issues that we're dealing with. You know, you've got one social worker in the building. You got like, kids that you really, you really just want to get them to the point where they will *come* to class and *try* to pay attention and give a good effort, you know? And that is like a *huge* thing, you know? And—this is actually the problem, right, and one of the reasons I wanted to leave, which, you know, was that, you feel like in the education system you're given, right, a template. You say, 'Okay, well, you're going to teach Algebra.' Right? And this has got to be your focus. And so the whole school is saying, we have



Algebra, we have Science, we have this—um, we have English, and they all need to meet this growth score. So you're constantly focusing on scores and growth. Constantly scores and growth. But then, at the end of the day, you're just like, all of this, right, for, like, what? You know? Was this really the best avenue to get them in a position where they're gonna be successful? You know? Um, because I feel that, you know, there's no, there's no jobs training. There's a lot of practical skills they're just straight missing out on, that they could really benefit from.

David echoed the above sentiments as he “was able to see that the system that's in place doesn't meet [their] needs whatsoever.” He stated,

The skills that they need before they can, you know, become productive members of society, and the things that we have to teach them to be productive members of society, are not standards-based. And the drive towards extreme standardization and over-testing of the kids is like, well, it looks like I'm gonna be a failing teacher because I'm more worried about them as a person than I am about them as a number-crunching, you know, system where we have to—and we get, we get data from the beginning of the year, data from the end of the year that, that shows their growth. Well, maybe the kid at the beginning of the year was a person who had no understanding of what it was like to work with other people, by the end of the year he would hold the door open for you. I consider success by the person, not a standard.

When asked what changes she would like to see in urban education, Beth circled back to standardized tests. She was reflective when she made her case, as if she visualized herself back in the urban setting while she spoke:

I think those poor babies have such a *hard* life from birth that more needs to be

addressed with them as individuals that will help them cope with their situation that will help them become productive adults in this country. And, the fact that anybody anymore only cares about a test score—I mean, it’s *far away* from reaching and growing that whole person that you can possibly be. And can anybody be to *not* just be a number, test score, it’s those kids. They need love, they need interaction, trust, fun, laughter. God knows how much laughter they have when they go home, you know? And, it’s almost non-existent because of the way everything is structured with tests and assessments and everything like that.—And I’m kind of like, just wonder, if you were just able—yes, still teach your standards and everything like that, but if you were able to make more of a community, more of a family feel of love and trust, how much would go away. How much of that crap would go away? And instead, we’re just like, sit here, take this pre-test, do this lesson like this, take this assessment. Do it again, do it again, do it again. And they can’t even *sit still* and they don’t see the value in education, so they’re just going through the game, too. We’re not *helping* them long-term. You know, it would be really neat if we could teach them in a way that would benefit them for their *life*, not just the next test.—I would love to see that happen. I don’t necessarily know how that could happen.

I asked Beth the reason she felt everything changed. She replied, Bush. That stupid No Child Left Behind, I think started it all.—All the way through *my* high school days, I never experienced these kinds of tests. You know, the college prep tests, sure, but not these *high-stakes*, standardized tests. I don’t think *any* of my elementary school teachers taught to any test, *ever*. They taught us what we needed to learn, they made the test based off of what we had learned, and yet, somehow between

the time I graduated—and started teaching,—I don't know, something happened. And every school started holding teachers accountable, not trusting teachers to do the right thing or to do what's best by the kids—try to weed out the bad teachers, and try to compare us to the rest of the world, and we're not like the rest of the world. You know? We're a creative, rebellious country...That's what we're founded on, you know? To compare us to somewhere, you know, like...where those kids don't have childhoods that we see, you know? It's *so* rigid and *so* structured, and there's no creativity. And, it's all about testing and then getting tutored for hours after school. It's different. It's apples to oranges, and yet we're comparing ourselves in this country to these others, and so I don't know. Something happened between when I was in high school and I started teaching, and it has not gone away. And I know like Obama got rid of No Child Left Behind, but it's just replaced by other crap. So I don't know. It'll probably change and get better by the time I retire and I'll never get to experience like a normal classroom, where teachers are actually like, valued.

Grace shared her views on standardized testing and the effect on students in the urban setting:

I would like to see them modify the curriculum, and adjust the data by basing it on the actual needs of the population that they're serving. I think they pay too much attention to generic data which reflects, um, groups—of children in a different society and not the society that our children come from. So I think that the data is a little too biased, and they need to make it reflect what children in this neighborhood, with these kinds of, uh, circumstances that they are living in, are actually capable of doing and not hold,—hold them to high standards, but not the *exact same* standards as you would a child who's

coming from a home that's not dysfunctional, a home where they have, um, the resources and the financial stability, and a totally different upbringing. I think the—standards of what you should be teaching them should be slightly different because they come from-- an environment where they haven't an advantage. Our children are disadvantaged so they need to close the gap, and the only way they can close the gap is by reaching, um, and teaching in the areas where, uh, social skills, which our students lack, um, trying to help our students with moral development, which our students lack, and I believe that needs to be part of the curriculum in the urban setting. And once they can master that, then the kids' minds will be able to function at the same level as the children that are coming from a higher, um, more—privileged environment. So it's not that they, they shouldn't be able to compete with them. They *could* compete with them and they *should* be able to once the other foundations have been met. But right now they don't have the foundation. The kids from more privileged environments do. So they'd have to build the foundation first so that the kids can build on from there, and compete with the children that already have, uh, those cornerstones and those foundations in place.

**Class Size/Caseload.** A change participants frequently suggested to improve urban education was in class size and caseload. Amy acknowledged that she did not know if large classes negatively affected non-urban schools, but she felt that smaller classes “would have the biggest impact” in an urban setting. Her words portrayed her experience:

Cramming classrooms so full that teachers can't teach, and now you put that in a place where behavior's out of control—I just feel like class size would make a *huge, huge* difference.—My last year I had 32, and that was unbearable. I mean it was, just the *bodies* in the room was hard to deal with let alone all the other stuff, the teaching part

of it, you know? Materials, anything.

The large class sizes made it “practically *impossible*” for Amy to meet with her students on an individual basis to monitor progress and check for understanding. She stated, “In elementary school it’s different because you have *all* the subjects.—If a kid’s struggling with multiplication—you’ve got 30 kids—that are in all different places, trying to make sure that they master those concepts.”

Jill was responsible for more than the maximum number of students in Special Education. In addition, she did not have any assistance from paraprofessionals or administration. She was assigned to spend the majority of her instructional time in several classrooms throughout the day. She felt that she was “spread thin.”

Beth referenced the large class sizes in her discussion of standardized testing. She stated, Thirty-plus kids in a classroom?—is not helping. I mean, that is *absurd, especially* with those kids, those babies who need more independent attention, or one-on-one attention because they don’t get any. And, instead of putting them in reasonable-sized classrooms where you can know stuff about them as a person, they can know stuff about you, you put this *mass* of these neglected kids in this classroom with this tired, underpaid teacher, and you tell them to sit still and you teach to the test and it’s like, gee, why isn’t this working? You know? It just, it needs to be completely overhauled. It just sucks.—Money speaks.—It comes from the top, from the government down. It needs to be changed to better these kids.—It’s not rocket science, and yet we’re doing nothing to truly address it. I almost feel like we’re, I mean we’re not making it worse, but we’re not helping.

Isabelle also experienced a larger than normal caseload for her Special Education

students. As Jill, she, too, did not receive any support from paraprofessionals. In addition, Isabelle had to work with what little resources the school provided, and found herself purchasing many materials from her own pocketbook. She stated that administration would respond with, “Oh, yeah, we’ll get to it. We’ll see. There’s no money.”

**Student Attendance/Tardiness.** Student attendance/tardiness also fell under the umbrella of political reasons teachers left the urban setting. Amy felt that attendance should be enforced not only from the school level, but from the state level, as well. She indicated attendance as one of the biggest obstacles she regularly faced. Even with rules and procedures in place, Amy often found that nothing was enforced with regard to student absenteeism. She explained,

There’s rules put in place and procedures....that, um, say that students can only be absent so many times, but those rules were thrown out the window on several occasions, and, it was an excuse. I mean, I don’t know how a kid can be expected to make the progress they’re supposed to make when they’re not in school and, it always seemed like we could not hold them accountable for those absences because it was never their fault or, whatever the case may be.

### **Research Question Responses**

Research Question one asked, “How do select elementary teachers describe the decision-making process they underwent before leaving urban education?” The theoretical framework of this study, Rotter’s (1991) locus of control and Condorcet’s decision theory (Hansson, 2005), both provided answers to Research Question one. Participants voiced the push-and-pull of factors that contributed to the decision to leave the urban education setting within metropolitan Detroit. Throughout each interview, an inability to improve upon the urban setting’s negative

circumstances was shared, i.e., circumstances seemingly out of one's control affected the ability of each participant to achieve a sense of accomplishment with regard to student achievement.

Catherine found the decision to leave urban education somewhat difficult. Although she described herself as "still invested in urban education," she felt stifled in the classroom and therefore left "in search of additional opportunities." David felt he had a supportive administration and had established a strong rapport with his students. However, he was moved to a different grade level in which he did not feel adequately prepared. In turn, relationships were not established and classroom instruction suffered. All participants expressed a desire to impact the lives of students in urban education, but Hope was the only teacher who stated that she was not a good fit for urban education.

Research Question two asked, "How do participants describe their experiences prior to their decision to leave urban education in metropolitan Detroit?" This question was answered by the themes which emerged from this study's data analysis (a) professional, (b) cultural and (c) political reasons for leaving urban education within metropolitan Detroit. Responses to this question went hand-in-hand with responses to Research Question three. Through answers to interview questions, participants provided insight into the experiences each so often faced. Feelings of frustration with a lack of administrative support, a lack of parental support and involvement and a lack of funding from the state as well as nation's political system were voiced by all, each to varying degrees. State-mandated/standardized tests were among the negative political experiences of participants. It was repeatedly expressed that urban students have higher needs, i.e., social/emotional, than their suburban counterparts, and that too much emphasis was placed on test scores. The lack of consistency in attendance regulation as well as crowded classrooms only added fuel to the fire of poor student achievement.

Research Question three asked, “What factors do participants identify as contributing to their decisions to leave the urban education setting in Detroit?” This question was also answered by the themes (a) professional, (b) cultural and (c) political reasons for leaving urban education within metropolitan Detroit. Isabelle referred to a lack of structure as well as a lack of resources that influenced her decision to leave. In fact, each of the participants discussed the lack of funding for resources and/or sufficient teacher salaries. Amy, Beth, Elizabeth, Fredrick, and Hope expressed disappointment with the lack of administrative support as it pertained to student behavior. The topic of parental involvement was an area of concern for all but Catherine and Isabelle. The contributing factors that led to participants’ decisions to leave the urban education setting were not isolated, but rather a culmination that each experienced on a regular basis. In addition, other contributing factors included insufficient preparation to teach in an urban environment, insufficient number of support staff, state-mandated/standardized tests, class size/caseload and student attendance/tardiness.

Research Question four asked, “What do teachers think about their decision since leaving urban education?” For most, it was not an easy decision to leave. For all, the decision did not happen overnight. Each participant expressed a strong desire to reach all learners, with Hope the only participant that felt mismatched for the urban educational setting. While participants expressed either missing the students, or wishing more could have been done to help urban students succeed, each knew that negative factors greatly outweighed the positive and that it was time to step away.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I shared the voices and experiences of participants who taught within the urban educational setting of metropolitan Detroit. These participants taught for a minimum of



two years, and left the setting (either for another educational setting or altogether) post 2009. This timeframe was selected in order to ascertain the effects, if any, Detroit's economic decline had on urban education. Data analysis of a transcribed focus group and individual interviews answered research questions two and three. Member checks were used to ensure credibility of my findings. Three overarching themes encapsulated participants' experiences and thus led to the decision to leave the urban education setting: professional reasons for leaving the urban educational setting, cultural reasons for leaving the urban educational setting and political reasons for leaving the urban educational setting. Subthemes were also discussed in accordance with frequency of open code appearance and relation to all three themes.

Experiences consistent with each participant included feelings of inadequate preparation to teach within an urban setting. The participants did not have the necessary arsenal of tools to combat deeply rooted areas of trauma and disengagement. Survival was frequently mentioned as first and foremost on the minds of most students, as well as their parents. With education seemingly taking a backseat, participants felt they were on the front lines of an ever-losing battle. The need for instruction in social skills was suggested by each participant, with David's allusion to the "Chinese Model"; he believed that students in the urban setting would greatly benefit from a sole focus on proper instruction in social skills, at an early age, before academics are introduced.

The passion participants shared for education was squelched, for most, by a seemingly endless storm of professional and political subterfuge. Voices were buried under the shouts of those with greater authority. Feelings of frustration and a sense of letdown were portrayed in the participants' stories as they spoke of their challenges. Despite, each participant held tight to his

or her belief that all children can learn and are entitled to the education America claims it provides.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this study was to understand the decision-making process of teachers who left the urban setting in metropolitan Detroit post 2009. Included in this chapter is a summary of the study's findings. In the subsequent discussion, the study's findings are held against the backdrop of empirical and theoretical research located in the literature review. Theoretical, empirical and practical implications are depicted. The chapter concludes with research delimitations and limitations, recommendations for future research and a chapter summary.

### **Summary of Findings**

A transcendental, phenomenological approach was used in order to bring the experiences of each participant into the foreground (Van Manen, 1990) and keep my past and current experiences as a teacher at bay. The act of withholding my experiences is also referred to by Husserl as *epoche* (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomena of 10 participants were captured from the elementary, middle and high school viewpoints, and encompassed general and special education settings, including two who had co-teaching assignments. The post 2009 timeframe was selected in order to ascertain correlations, if any, between teachers' decisions to leave and the economic decline of metropolitan Detroit. The theories that framed this study were Rotter's (1991) locus of control and Condorcet's decision theory (Hansson, 2005).

The process of data collection involved a triangulation of methods which included a focus group, individual interviews and member checks. Transcription of both the focus group and individual interviews provided written material for analysis. Atlas.ti was utilized to assign codes which, in turn, facilitated the emergence of themes. Three overarching themes were identified: professional, cultural and political. Under the umbrella of professional reasons for

leaving the urban education setting emerge two subthemes: insufficient administrative support and insufficient preparation to teach in an urban environment. Theme two, cultural reasons for leaving the urban educational setting, two subthemes emerged: student behavior and insufficient parental support and involvement. Under the third theme, political reasons for leaving the urban education setting, five subthemes emerged: insufficient funding to meet students' needs, insufficient number of support staff, state-mandated/standardized tests, class size/caseload and student attendance/tardiness.

The four research questions that laid the foundation for this study were:

1. How do select teachers, Kindergarten through twelfth grade, describe the decision-making process they underwent before leaving urban education in metropolitan Detroit?
2. How do participants describe their experiences prior to their decision to leave urban education in metropolitan Detroit?
3. What factors do participants identify as contributing to their decision to leave the urban education setting in metropolitan Detroit?
4. What do participants think about their decision since leaving urban education in metropolitan Detroit?

The stories each teacher shared conveyed a passion for teaching, a heart for those in underserved communities and a desire to see all children receive an education he or she deserved. These traits, though admirable, were not enough to withstand the stark realities of each setting. Each theme and subtheme answered research questions two and three. Participants ascribed professional and political reasons to the experiences and factors behind their decision to leave the urban education setting. Research questions one and four were addressed by

participants' responses in light of the theoretical framework of locus of control and decision theory.

From a professional viewpoint, many teachers either felt un-supported, or under-supported by administration, mostly with regard to student discipline. Other areas included lack of support in terms of conflict with parents and a disallowance for teacher input on decisions affecting instruction. Participants were in agreement that politics negatively influenced urban education in matters of funding, class size, support staff and state-mandated/standardized tests. Of biggest concern was the discrepancy of allocated resources among schools. Teachers discussed the academic and socio-emotional deficiencies that often accompany students representing a low socioeconomic status. Funding based on neighborhood affluence chips away at urban education's chances of success even further; when funds are few, resources are limited. Such deficiencies make it difficult for urban schools to compete with their suburban counterparts. Unfortunately, schools aren't measured by the socio-emotional progress of students; rather, they are measured and compared by test scores. Urban schools cannot compete, as [they] work from an unfair advantage from the start.

Throughout the study, participants' shared the extraneous components that accompanied the profession. These challenges which include but are not limited to student behavior, funding, and lack of support were addressed. Teachers found themselves shouldering each burden. Catherine explained that the issues present in an urban setting are evident, yet teacher accountability measures do not consider outside constituents:

Um, I think it reinforced my perceptions about um, class and race and societal commitments to equity, and—especially equity through education. You know, we have this, this societal belief that, um, education is the way to improve yourself and that equal

opportunity, it's all about how it'd work. And I think working in an urban environment it lays bare that there are barriers, um, that even the hardest working child with the most committed teachers around her um, can't always overcome. And, and I think it also, there's also this narrative of like, "Well, if kids are failing it's just 'cuz teachers aren't good enough, our schools aren't good enough." And um, I, my personal experience as well as my education has led me to know that there are other societal forces, like generational poverty, and racism that um, that are *huge* factors in the success of the education of a child, not just me and that kid.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the decision-making process of teachers who left the urban setting in metropolitan Detroit. Theories that framed this study were Rotter's (1991) locus of control and Condorcet's decision theory (Hansson, 2005) as they investigated the experiences leading to teachers' decisions to leave the urban setting within metropolitan Detroit. A discussion of the two theories, in addition to the empirical literature discussed in Chapter Two are compared with the experiences described by the participants.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Whether unfavorable events or working conditions stemmed from a state or local setting, participants agreed that they tried to make the best of each situation. Grace described herself as "an army of one" when she wanted to correct the injustices, which led to a diminishment of passion for education and subsequent decision to leave that particular setting. Rotter's (1990) theory of locus of control relates to Grace's as well as the other nine participants' teaching experiences and subsequent decisions to leave the urban educational setting within metropolitan Detroit. An internal locus of control was evident as each participant exercised the power of

choice between staying or leaving. However, an external locus of control had greater influence over participants' decisions as "extraneous circumstances determine one's next steps" (Rotter, 1990, p. 489).

More specifically, Spector's amended view of Rotter's theory, WLOC, is applicable (Fitzgerald & Clark, 2013). This theory states that "individuals with an external work locus of control (WLOC) think that they have little control over events and circumstances in the workplace (Oliver, Jose, & Brough, 2006). In addition, "individuals with an internal WLOC believe that they are responsible for their achievement and their failures in the workplace and that they can control their surroundings (2006). This was evident as participants weighed their effectiveness against their perceived failures and successes.

Grace further described the experiences that led to her decision to leave:

The work load is intense, constantly shuffling through papers, grading assignments, planning, creating activities, tracking down resources, and implementing non-negotiables from the state, and district. It seems like teachers have to work two jobs instead of one since we take our work home, however we are only being paid for one. The stress and work load combined with a low salary make teaching no longer a desirable profession.

Although the decision was made to leave, Catherine, David, Elizabeth, Fredrick and Grace shared that theirs' was not without difficulty. Under Condorcet's decision theory (Hansson, 2005), these participants fell under the "decision of uncertainty" (2005); negative experiences were had, and the negative outweighed the positive.

Throughout the study, it was discovered that the two theories of locus of control and decision theory could not be applied as separate entities. Rather, the events and decisions in each participant's experience had a cause-and-effect nature. While it is impossible to ascertain the

sequence of events and their effect on decisions, or vice versa, it can be stated with confidence that both decisions and events were related. Therefore, I did not attempt to discuss each theory in isolation. The push and pull of experiences affecting participants' decisions to leave the urban setting within metropolitan Detroit is described below.

Hope shared that she held “many reasons” for leaving the urban setting and is happy with her decision. She considered it a privilege to work in the urban setting, but found that it was not for her. She shared her heart through her story:

I knew I didn't think I was going to teach middle school ever in my life. But I thought, okay, this is the opportunity, I have to try it, to see if that's something that, you know, I *would* consider. And after going through that particular year, um, because there were kids who were violent, who were, uh, uncontrollable, who, kinda, I mean, they were bigger than me too. So, I can't, there was a lot of like, okay, you know, this kid, if they got angry enough, they could, they could do some damage to somebody or even myself. And uh, it was just, it was um, it was not, it was not a fun year because I felt I had to deal more with behavioral issues than teaching content, and I wanna teach content. I wanna know my kids. I want them to have a good learning experience. I want them to enjoy school. I want them to see that it can be fun. However, that was really a challenge with this group. And, I, I felt that because I wasn't like—they saw me unlike them at all, that they really did not want to let me in. And it took a really long time to, to get past that if, if I could even get past that. Some of them, you know, there was just a real hardness and a block, a, that I couldn't, I couldn't penetrate through some of—the things, some of the walls that were built up. But, some I was able to. So—uh, I just think, you know, teaching should be a good experience. It should be fun. It shouldn't be a feeling of, “I am



a warden of a detention facility” and you know, I, you know, I’m, you know, what I’m gonna be. What I’m facing each day, with whether chairs are being thrown, or anger, tempers are being flared, um, it seemed like there was always a, “I don’t wanna do that,” “Why do I have to do that?” “Don’t tell me what to do” kind of attitude. And actually, that was settling. I’m like, “I’m not telling you what to do. This is why you’re *here*. And this is what school is about. It’s not really about me being your boss. It’s about me helping you. I’m on the same team.” But it was hard to get that across with these young minds. And, I thought, you know, it’s not a fight for me and I’m not gonna put myself in a position where I have to fight for that. I need to be able to convince them as best I can, but, um, you know, there were a lot of, I think a lot of things that stood in the way of that. And they, they were cultural things. They were, things that I have not had training or time to, to really get a full understanding of, and be able to approach it differently as much as I wanted to.

Additionally, Elizabeth shared her frustration with the system and the lack of professionalism she witnessed:

I had kind of had it in my mind that maybe I, I couldn’t continue teaching forever, um, because of uh, you know, sort of all these, sort of things that I’ve been hitting on, and how much that bugged me to kind of feel like I was in this situation, and the profession wasn’t really respected. And um, you want to feel like, you want to be a professional, especially in something like teaching where it requires so much of your time and it requires so much of your care. And it’s really a craft that you have to develop. And so if you don’t feel that you’re being treated as a professional, and you’re not given the time and the collaboration and you feel like, um, you know, you’re just kind of like—I don’t

know, you, you're just kind of the person who's always blamed. You know? But you're sitting there and trying to struggle and do things right, and the system just leaves you to feel like it's not addressing your students' needs and you're the one that they have to face every day, so they see *you* as part of the system and you don't agree with the system, I don't want to stand there and look at kids I really care about and tote ideas and make things, you know, do what I'm, what I'm being told to do if I don't agree with it, you know? Or if I don't agree with, um, yeah, how things are going. So, yeah.—I had already kind of thought about leaving and I kind of already had it in my mind, I was like, 'If I stay for another year at this school, I'm going to stay for like 30.' You know?

The decision to leave the urban setting did not happen overnight. Rather, it resulted as a culmination of negative experiences. Words and phrases participants used to describe these experiences are identified in alphabetical order of participant names:

- I'd go home completely stressed out (Amy).
- It wasn't just one specific thing. It was a bunch of things (Amy).
- Teachers being held accountable for things that they can't control (Amy).
- If we're gonna constantly make excuses for 'em and yet we're being held accountable for what happens with them...(Amy).
- Looking back, I realize that stress really did a lot to my health (Amy).
- Stress (Beth)
- Why would anybody go into this profession (Beth)?
- You try to be the happy point in these kids' day—however, that's *exhausting* (Beth).
- (referring to positive experiences) Very few in-between (Beth).

- (referring to positive experiences) Not enough to make me even consider staying (Beth).
- It was killing me—I was so upset and stressed (Beth).
- Stress and strain (Catherine)
- There's *so* many reasons (David).
- I'm taking my work home with me because I'm trying to do the best for these kids and I can't (David).
- I was dealing with situations and life experiences I have absolutely no frame of reference for (David).
- You don't feel that you're being treated as a professional (Elizabeth).
- You're—trying to struggle and do things right (Elizabeth).
- There's *so* many problems—makes it *really dysfunctional* (Elizabeth).
- Worth taking the pay cut because of the stress (Fredrick).
- My doctor had said—that I need to cut some stress out (Fredrick)
- I had to buy my own projector (Fredrick).
- I don't have the ability to spend time with [my daughter]—taking loads of work home (Grace).
- You were to blame for *everything* (Grace).
- (referring to places she taught): Those neighborhoods, they're very, very cold. It's about business, that's it (Grace).
- Very, very challenging (Grace)
- Kind of lost my passion (Grace)
- One voice (Grace)

- Not enough support (Grace)
- Kind of infuriated with the profession (Grace)
- Very hostile working environment (Grace)
- Stress-related health issues (Grace)
- High stress environment (Grace)
- Stress and work load combined with a low salary (Grace)
- Overall, the stress and politics were just *too* powerful (Grace).
- Regarding my health issues, they are associated with stress related to this profession.—The doctors informed me that if I did not find a way to manage and deal with my stress that my condition would worsen. However, in this high stress environment I find it difficult to improve (Grace).
- There were many reasons (Hope).
- It didn't have that many resources. That's why I left (Isabelle).
- And I left because of, you know, salary (Isabelle).
- If [the school] were a little bit more structured, I would have stayed (Isabelle).
- I felt like more of a helper than uh, a certified teacher (Jill).
- It's stressful (Jill).

Despite the plethora of negative references to the experiences, some participants admitted that the decision to leave was difficult. Grace shared,

I feel much better. However, I do miss some of the children. I really feel like they were benefitting from my presence there. And any teacher that truly wants to teach and loves kids, they're benefitting from people like that.—It is a shame when teachers like myself and others *have* to leave because of the politics that are in play. But, at

the same time, I knew that I couldn't physically or mentally, um, stay in that environment anymore because it was, uh, changing my attitude and belief system, so I knew I had to leave.

While Catherine holds many positive experiences dear to her heart, her main reason for leaving was the bureaucracy of the upper administration. To this day, she remains invested in urban education; she extended her passion for the "underserved community" to train and mentor teachers who are in situations similar to what the participants faced. She did share, however,

I don't know that I could feel great about leaving completely. I'm just a quarter of a century invested, and that's kind of who I am. But um, with that said, I was also a quarter century in kind of sick and tired of not being sure if I was gonna be able to pay my bills, and um, and send my kids to college, and drive a car that's not 10 years old. Um, so having your pay frozen for seven plus years. Um, then the demands of the job, if anything, get higher rather than lower. Um, and then add to that, you know, just the stress and strain of are you gonna be in the same classroom or are you gonna be in the same school, is your school gonna close?—It's nice to be in a position that feels more stable. And um, have compensation, which I've earned, right (chuckling)? So my siblings and my friends who chose other professions and um, and advanced in their professions for 25 years and have something to show for it.—I'm making, before I left --- last year I was making less, like *gross*, grossing less than I was 15 years before. So they started all the pay concessions and freezes; so not only was I not increasing in salary, I had actually lost ground.

David reflected on the feelings about his decision to leave as "a mixed bag." He continued,

I loved education, clearly. Um, so on some level, I feel a little bit bad because I miss teaching. Um, I kind of feel bad about how I ended up leaving, where it was like one day I was there and the next day I was kind of gone.

On the positive side, David stated, “Things have gone *really well* for me.—Financially, it was a *much* better decision. Um, you know, time with my family was a much, you know, everything about it, seems to be a pretty solid decision to have done what I’ve done. Um, so overall I’m happy. Um, I wish I could make the kind of money I’m making now um, as a teacher, and have a little bit less of the problems, you know?—If I could be back in that [first] setting making what I’m making now, I’d be there in a heartbeat.

Elizabeth echoed David’s sentiments in that she misses teaching. She shared her mixed emotions,

I don’t feel great, totally, about it. I miss it a lot.—It’s kind of hard.—I can’t say that I look and say, ‘Wow, it’s so great that I left,’ um, ‘cuz I miss it a lot, you know?—I feel a little bit freer, which is nice. And I feel a bit like, there’s more opportunities in front of me, um, than there were in education. So I kind of, that’s a nice feeling. But uh, I miss the kids and I know there’s still work to be done there. And it’s kind of like, I guess, I feel okay because I feel motivated in the direction that I’m going to be doing something, you know?—To kind of overcome some of these injustices—do my best part to help, you know? Um, and so that kind of keeps me from feeling too bad—But I do really miss um, I miss teaching. It felt meaningful and I miss the kids.

Fredrick enjoyed teaching in the middle school setting, and indicated that he would have stayed if not for the opportunity to take a less stressful job. He shared, “I don’t know if I was

ready to step out of it at the time, and so that's why it was a big decision." Looking back, Fredrick indicated that a lower salary was a good trade-off for the stress he was under. He stated, "I think this decision was good. Um, and then what I'm learning in the position that I'm in now, I think is valuable if I do plan to step back into the classroom." Fredrick works with students at the college level. He also researches best practices with intent "to create a program that will help the student—struggling in Mathematics." Fredrick continues to implement his philosophical belief that relationship helps students want to do the math rather than feel that the work is an imposition.

Isabelle commented that she "liked the parents" and "loved the urban setting" but realized that middle school was not the right setting. She relocated to an urban elementary school and eventually decided to leave due to lack of resources and low pay. When asked how she felt about her decision to leave the urban setting, Hope replied, "I feel great." Though she expressed gratitude for the opportunity, she recognized that the inner-city setting was not a good fit.

### **Empirical Literature**

**Insufficient preparation to teach in an urban environment.** Further, participants recognized a need for more preparation from colleges and universities. This expressed need correlated with Siwatu's (2011) suggested that ways to prepare prospective teachers for the urban contexts need identified as well as an identification of the components of a structured system that supports new teachers as they face new challenges within the urban context.

**Insufficient parental support and involvement.** Parental support was another component participants desired in the urban educational setting. The belief that students would show greater academic achievement was shared. This belief holds merit, as Jeynes (2005) study

on the effects of parental involvement indicated positive effect on student achievement.

Variables included in Jeynes' (2005) study that resonated with participants' comments included (a) communication, (b) homework, (c) parental expectations and (d) attendance and participation (Jeynes, 20005, pp. 245-6).

**Insufficient funding to meet students' needs.** As Detroit continues to face financial challenges, policymakers continue to try to remedy the situation. Unfortunately, this is not void of individuals blaming one another for Detroit's economic crisis. Both camps claim to have the students' best interest at heart. Yet, while union representatives argue with state politicians for control over educational decisions, students continue to suffer. Participants unanimously agreed that the schools of Detroit's inner-city faced a vast inequity of funding. Responses from both the focus group as well as individual interviews echoed the sentiments of Revered Wendell Anthony, president of the NAACP, Detroit chapter. Anthony (2011) stated, "No honest or meaningful conversation about reform can take place without addressing the discriminatory and woefully inadequate way in which we finance public instruction in Michigan" (PR Newswire, 2011, June 20). Seven years after this Anthony uttered these words, the situation remains the same: schools face an inequity of funding.

**State-mandated/standardized tests.** Among the complaints which pertain to standardized tests, teachers in metropolitan Detroit's urban setting saw the importance of social skill development in urban youth. The experiences which led to these beliefs were evident in student behavior and with the demands also known as high-stakes testing. High-stakes testing, or standardized tests, increased in number with the implementation of NCLB. The implementation of NCLB began with the idea that all children can succeed, and all children should succeed. This stemmed from the knowledge that there is a disequilibrium between urban



and suburban schools (Hochbein, Mitchell, & Pollio, 2013, p. 270). The responsibility of such academic success rested solely on the schools, specifically, teachers. Unfortunately, participants' experiences were synonymous with a comment made by Desimone (2013) that education changed gears from "genuine instruction" to "test preparation" (Desimone, 2013, p. 59). Social skills became a thing of the past as policymakers focused only on test scores (Carey, 2014, p. 446).

### **New Contributions to the Field**

The majority of the literature contained within Chapter Two focused on the negative aspects of urban education, along with the financial difficulties Detroit continues to face. However, the research did present two areas that were proven to have a positive effect on urban education and thus, teacher retention: teacher-student relationships and teacher expectations. When teacher-student relationships are established, teachers can then hold students to high expectations. When teachers take the time to establish a relationship with the students, trust is established. This, in turn, can be key to increased student motivation and success (Adams, 2014, p. 140). Participants' experiences with establishing relationships and subsequent trust are included below:

**Teacher-student relationships.** A discussion of teachers' negative experiences within the urban setting, or any setting, might leave a reader wondering if there were any positive experiences. Therefore, this study would be remiss to omit the positive stories shared by the participants. Several positive experiences were shared in the interviews. Discussion and analysis indicated that these experiences revolved around one idea: connection/relationship. Connection/relationship in education refers to the level of rapport that is established between two or more individuals. Grace and Beth had positive remarks about the importance of connections.

Beth stated, “It’s all about the person, not about the teaching. And it’s about the connection. So there were good times.” She continued,

There were those couple kids that, you feel like you actually reached not just on an educational but personal level, that you think that you might have impacted them, bettered them, somehow, from knowing you.—And it’s sad: out of seven years teaching, I maybe have *four* kids? But it was like those kids made it worth it.

Grace remembered shared experiences of holiday parties and field trips. “When we went on our field trips, those were nice outings for us and the kids so we can bond and actually do something, um, together.” From this point on, both terms were used interchangeably.

### **Trust.**

***Student trust.*** A recurrent effect of connections between teachers and students was trust. Fredrick noted that trust was a by-product of relationships and was passionate in his belief that relationships were necessary in order to gain the trust of his Middle and High school students. He felt that overall, the level of trust had between him and his students was positive. Jill stated that she and her students “had a good trust level.” She remembered her daily interactions with students. Over time, students began to trust Jill as she consistently covered missing assignments and homework. She was faithful to accentuate the positive and engage the students with questions. “Over time, they would ask me for help,” Jill proudly recalled.

Elizabeth laughed as she looked back on a pivotal moment that screamed she had earned her student’s trust. Setting the backdrop for the particular experience, she talked about the wall her High school students had at the beginning of the year. Not surprised by this, she knew “there was a certain period where they had to get to know me. But it’s like that with every teacher, you know?” Elizabeth continued,

And I had to get to know them, too. But I didn't *not* trust them, you know? I knew, like, they're students.—I mean I wouldn't put my, like, trust, I wouldn't put my cell phone out. Not at first. Uh, after a while and once they got to know you and they start to respect you, then they'll let you know, 'By the way, your phone is out. Be careful' (laughter). You know? And it's like, aha! That's how you know you have a good relationship: when one of your students is like a *known* cell phone thief and is like, 'Hey, you might want to be careful about that.'

Without hesitation, Isabelle stated that there was "so much trust" between herself and her students. She continued, "They trusted me so much. I had one student, Kevon. He used to call me 'Mama'."

Catherine referred to a "very high" level of trust shared with her students:

Little kids you kind of just get that, thank goodness. Um, Middle schoolers you have to earn it. Um, also thank goodness (chuckles). But I think, um, I was able to do so. Um, and then build sort of rapport over the years with kids and families, um, so that people did trust me, and trust that I had the best interest of the students at heart.

**Staff trust.** Participants shared a positive amount of trust with other teachers, as well, and Catherine proudly reported a "very high" level of trust in this arena, as well. She shared,

There's also kind of like a shared ordeal like, 'We are here, we're committed to this.' And people around us are all crazy (laughing), right? They're closing schools, and they're moving teachers, and they're telling us we're idiots and they're paying us less.-- But we trust and care for each other and know what each person is bringing.

Elizabeth "felt a lot of trust" at her first school. She stated, "I felt like they knew me, they knew where I was coming from, I knew what made them tick.—we had common goals

there.” Amy noted she could trust feelings and frustrations to her teaching partner and others she worked with closely. She shared, “I felt like I could vent to them and not have it be held against me at any point.” Beth described her level of trust with select colleagues as therapeutic:

We would laugh and it was like therapy to be around them because we could joke and make fun of awkward situations. But, a lot of us to get through the day, you know, being supportive, without judgment, just being there for each other and that was really cool.”

The act of working together where trust is established can enhance morale and feelings of effectiveness. It is not uncommon to find teachers collaborating on lesson plans, preparing materials together, and discussing ways to improve instructional methods. Catherine attributed one of her many positive experiences to the art of teacher collaboration. She shared,

I think in every school in which I’ve been, um, the teachers have cared deeply about each other as people, so there’s been like strong friendships. Um, but then also *really* been invested in their craft as teaching, and so, would meet regularly through school a lot of times but very regularly outside of that. So Saturday, and evenings, and over the summer, and co-planning, and sharing resources, um, that was the norm in each of the buildings in, in which I worked.

Hope shared that while her main focus remained on educating the students, she did not experience any distrust with colleagues. She did form a couple of close friendships which have carried into the present. David spoke of “quite a bit” of trust with coworkers. He commented about his first setting, “The team that I had was *really* good. We all got along really well. We would hang out outside of work.” He was not as close with his teaching partner in the second setting, but there was still a bond of trust. Each of these experiences correlate with the findings of Adams (2014) in his study on teacher-student relationships and collective trust. Adams’

(2014) study revealed that “collective trust was the strongest school-level antecedent of (a) positive student beliefs, (b) behavior, and (c) achievement (Adams, 2014, p. 150).

***Increased student motivation.*** Fredrick attributed relationship to a change in students’ attitudes toward Mathematics. When asked about positive classroom experiences he stated, I would say it’s just um, seeing some students turn around. Um, like I said a lot of times with Mathematics, it’s um, students don’t like Math. They don’t see why they have to study math. Uh, they don’t see it as valuable. So, building those relationships and um, seeing them—turn themselves around where it’s now—they come to class not because they *have to* but because they *want to*—You see their, their attitude change a little bit, um, to be more positive, more of that I *can do* this rather than I *have to* do this.

Frederick noted that this was the case with the majority of his students, including those whose mathematical abilities were low. He continued,

Even the relationship, you know, it’s like, that played, that was valuable for ‘em, but—their level of knowledge was still so low that, um, it was, still wasn’t enough to bring them up to where they should be—with the level of the class. Um, but for the most part, we found that was a useful thing, not so much the—getting them to a high level, but, just for them to—see that mathematics was valuable for ‘em, um, and the reasons for studying it.

Elizabeth shared, “I had a lot of connections that I made.—They were learning and they, you know, they showed growth like on test scores (laughs)—and I saw them improving over the course of the years.” She also stated,

“Just being with the kids. I mean, honestly, like just, even that whole, having good connections, um, and constantly working on that—and, getting to know the kids, and getting to see them be them, you know, and grow and learn. And having that development where, you know, where you see that relationship develop and you see them grow.”

## **Implications**

### **Implications for Educators**

Educators can utilize the results of this study to self-reflect. They can determine if their philosophy aligns with what urban students need. Educators can also apply any new methods to their pedagogy that were expressed through the participants’ experiences. Those aspiring to teach or wondering if teaching is for them can also use this study’s findings to make an informed career choice.

Students within the urban setting need dedicated teachers. Many students within this setting will arrive with academic, as well as socio-emotional deficiencies. It is important for educators in this field to take the time to establish relationships and build a rapport with his or her students. As it was experienced first-hand by the participants, and noted in the empirical literature, relationships lead to trust. Trust leads to increased motivation and academic achievement (Adams, 2014, p. 150).

### **Implications for Administrators**

Administrators can utilize this study’s findings to reflect on their own practices within the urban setting. They can focus on areas of school culture, school leadership, mentoring programs, and pedagogy. Administrators should take heed to the voices of this study’s participants. Although teachers are in a place of leadership within their classroom, the leadership example

should consist of a top-down approach. Teachers need to be heard. Consistent expectations and structure are necessary. When teachers do not know what to expect, spur-of-the-moment decisions can negatively alter one's sense of security. Such decisions can create feelings of uneasiness and insecurity in a teacher. If there is conflict with a parent, administrators should always uphold the teacher in a positive light; if the teacher is in the wrong, the administrator should still present the teacher in a positive light, as one having good intentions. Administrators should seek to cultivate rapport between teachers and parents as often as possible.

### **Implications for Policymakers**

Those behind the scenes of education can truly listen to the thoughts, feelings, experiences and suggestions of the teachers represented in this study. Among many complaints, standardized testing and the atrocity of funding based on demographics are things that can only be changed by policymakers. It is past time for policymakers to change the course of urban education. Listen to the experiences of the participants. Seek urban schools within the inner-cities of Detroit as well as nationwide. Sit down with teachers and truly listen to what is said. Focus on the children. When making decisions, ask if the decision is appropriate for [your] sons or daughters, nieces, nephews or grandchildren. Finally, as Catherine suggested, have community involvement; supply "wrap-around services" for students to help with trauma.

### **Implications for Teacher Preparatory Programs**

Although it was expressed by a few participants that it is impossible to fully prepare someone for the urban, or any, school setting, the participants did agree that teacher preparatory programs could do more. Colleges and universities can use the results of this study to develop ways to address the needs expressed by the participants. Teachers need to be properly equipped to face the challenges that accompany urban students. Teacher preparatory programs should visit

urban schools and talk with teachers and administrators. Ask questions as to what the fundamental needs are. Use findings from the empirical literature as well as this study's findings to form the basis of instruction. Follow up with teachers who took the course(s) in urban education and evaluate his or her progress as well as self-efficacy and emotional well-being. Offer support services to new teachers. Assign veteran teachers as mentors to new teachers.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

Delimitations for this study were three-fold. First, participants selected for the study included both novice and experienced teachers, as both left the urban education field in metropolitan Detroit. Second, participants taught in the urban sector, in either a general or special education classroom for at least two years in the metropolitan Detroit area. Third, participants left the urban education sector since 2009. The reason for this timeframe was to determine the effects, if any, the downfall of the automotive industry in 2009 and Detroit's subsequent economic undoing had on teachers' decisions to leave urban education within metropolitan Detroit.

Limitations to this study were four-fold. First, as an educator in the urban elementary sector of metropolitan Detroit, I had to bracket my own experiences of teaching in this setting from those voiced by the participants. Second, the sampling process enabled me to conduct an in-depth study of the participants studied, but the information that was discovered, though it may prove helpful, may not be transferable. Third, not all participants still resided within metropolitan Detroit. This affected whether data was collected in person or through a teleconferencing portal. Finally, the timeframe was a limitation as the participants' phenomena were experienced after an unfavorable economic time which, in turn, adversely affected the teaching environment.



### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Since the nature of this study was focused on teachers' experiences within the urban setting of metropolitan Detroit, the findings are not generalizable. Additional, replicated studies in urban areas across the nation are necessary to form a complete picture. Additional studies in which administrators in urban settings are the participants are suggested. Such studies would shed light on experiences from another angle, and perhaps form a more well-rounded view.

It is recommended that a study is conducted on teachers' lived experiences of teaching in a setting with a low socioeconomic status. David taught in both a predominantly White and a predominantly African-American setting, each with a low socioeconomic status. He observed similarities with regard to "behavior and issues—not being prepared—to be educated, and—not treating school with great importance" (David, personal communication, November 15, 2016).

The topic of social skills and classroom management frequented participants' responses. A longitudinal study among two group of primary-age students representative of a low socioeconomic status from birth is recommended. Beginning with the primary age of Preschool, assign one group to receive instruction and training in social skills through the First Grade. Assign the other group to receive the regularly assigned education. Track the following for each group from Preschool to Grade Six: age, gender, race, number of parents in the household, parental role, parental involvement, socioeconomic status, factors affecting the socioeconomic status, health, other challenges, type of upbringing, academic aptitude and current social skills. Understanding that the population of students will likely change over the years, track the cohort. At the end of Grade Six, compare the results of both groups.

Teachers expressed the desire, as well as the difficulty of making educational topics relevant to students' lives. A study of culture and home life could shed light on things that motivate students in an urban setting.

A study on the effects of class size on teachers' experiences between a suburban and urban setting could elucidate information on whether class size is a factor in poor achievement among urban students.

It is necessary to conduct a study of teacher preparatory programs to ascertain the degree and depth of preparation aspiring teachers receive to work in the urban setting.

It is also necessary to study urban teacher preparatory programs that are successful and discover the qualities that make them successful.

### **Summary**

As teachers reflected on their experiences within the urban setting, a unified desire to reach all learners was evident. Participants shared commonalities of a holistic philosophy and the importance of relationship. The decision to leave resulted from a culmination of factors outside of their control, factors that hindered effective educational practices. Although each teacher can quickly recall positive memories, the amount and/or degree of opposition each teacher faced greatly outweighed the benefits. Perhaps Elizabeth's closing comments best summarized the decision-making process. She explained,

I always felt with this that, it's just, it's not that any one thing, you know—I mean, there's a few one things I would change, right? But for the most part, it's like you have like, like one brick could be missing and things could still go together. But it's more like you have a brick missing here, and here, and here, and here and here. And there's *so* many problems that are just—everything just a little bit makes it *really*

*dysfunctional*, you know? Um, just a little bit not having your school tight, just having that, *plus* the consistent trancies, *plus* the behavior, *plus* the high percentage of Special Ed., *plus* the lack of funding, *plus* the lack of curriculum, *plus* the turnover. You know what I mean? Just like, the fact that it's *all* of these happening, just makes it really unbearable. And I, yeah, so that was one thing that was part of my decision was the fact, and I keep lamenting over it. I'm like, 'Man, if just a couple things are better,' you know? It'd be enough to keep me. But because it's *all* of these things, right? It's just *all* of these things put together and—knowing the system was dysfunctional from that. And not having control to change it, you know? And looking at kids every day in the eye and thinking, you know, 'Here I am, part of this system, and you trust me.' You know what I mean? And I'm the face of this, you know? And knowing that you don't agree with it, that, and that there's all these things that you want to fix. Um, and, and I do want to say that, that sometimes I feel like I'm not a big enough person. Like, if I was a bigger person I would have stayed, you know? And, or if I had been, maybe not, not if I had, maybe not just that or if I had been a little more, um, you know, a little comfortable with uh, with things not being perfect. And maybe that's like something I should just learn to just be alright with the way things are, and uh—but it always stressed me out because I wanted it, to see it better. And so I think, just dealing with that day-to-day. And maybe like in, in some frame of my mind, I wish I would have just been able to just kind of be comfortable and just deal with it, you know, and teach anyway. But, yeah.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A IRB Approval

# LIBERTY UNIVERSITY<sup>®</sup>

## INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

January 12, 2016

Melissa Holtzhouse

IRB Approval 2382.011216: The Aftermath of Detroit's Economic Decline and the Exodus of Urban Elementary Teachers: A Phenomenology

Dear Melissa,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

*Administrative Chair of  
Institutional Research* **The  
Graduate School**

## **APPENDIX B IRB Approval of Change in Protocol**

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from 1/12/16 to 1/11/17 Protocol # 2382.011216

### **Consent Form Regarding**

An Investigation of the Decision-Making Process behind Teachers' Decisions to Leave the Urban Education Setting within Metropolitan Detroit, Post 2009  
Melissa Holtzhouse Liberty University School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study that is trying to understand the decision-making process behind teachers' decisions to leave the urban education setting within metropolitan Detroit, post 2009. You were selected as a possible participant because you have left the urban setting within metropolitan Detroit during the timeframe specified. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Melissa Holtzhouse (Liberty University Doctoral Candidate) for completion of the dissertation required by the Ed.D. program in Curriculum and Instruction.

#### **Background Information**

The purpose of this study is to understand the decision-making process of teachers who left the urban setting in metropolitan Detroit since the economic decline of 2009.

#### **Procedures**

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things: (1) Participate in an audio and video recorded focus group (approximately 2 hours) in which I would hold a discussion with Q&A regarding experiences of teaching in the urban setting within metropolitan Detroit, (2) participate in one or more audiotaped individual interviews (approximately 1 hour for the initial and 30 minutes subsequent) in which you could provide further information regarding your experiences of teaching in the urban setting and your decision-making process to leave that setting, and (3) provide any written documents such as e-mails or journals (that are already completed and applicable) that would help me understand your decision-making process to leave the urban setting within metropolitan Detroit.

#### **Risks and Benefits of being in the Study**

The risks involved are no more than participants would encounter when going about their daily activities.

Individuals should not expect to receive any direct benefit from participating in this study.

#### **Compensation**

Since the nature of this study is to help expand research on urban education and improve its status in academia, participants will not be compensated.

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from 1/12/16 to 1/11/17 Protocol # 2382.011216.

#### Confidentiality

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. I cannot assure that others involved in the focus group will keep participant information confidential.

The schools, participants, and any other names disclosed during the study will receive pseudonyms. All data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. All digital data will be password protected. All data will be destroyed through permanent deletion (digital) or shredding (physical) after three years of the study's completion.

#### Voluntary Nature of the Study

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any questions or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

#### How to Withdraw from the Study

Should you wish to withdraw from the study, please notify me in writing of your intent to withdraw. You can e-mail this request to me at [mjgray@liberty.edu](mailto:mjgray@liberty.edu). Should you withdraw, please include reasons why you chose to no longer participate. All data collected from participants who choose to withdraw will be destroyed through permanent deletion (digital) or shredding (physical) on the same day of withdrawal.

#### Contacts and Questions

The local researcher conducting this study is: Melissa Holtzhouse. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact this person at  
or the Committee Chair, Dr. Deanna L. Keith, at,

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher or Committee Chair, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Suite 1887, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

### APPENDIX C Pilot Study Interview Template

“Thank you for agreeing to this interview and allowing me to audiotape it for later review.”

(Prompts: “Tell me more...”, “Can you elaborate on that...”, “Why do you think...”, “Why did you state...”

#### *The Decision to Enter Education*

1. During the focus group, you answered the question about why you decided to become a teacher. Would you like to expand on your answer?
2. How long did you teach in the urban setting?
3. What grade(s) did you teach?
4. What factors led you to teach in the urban setting?
5. How would you describe your philosophy of teaching?

Probe: How did your philosophy impact or negate your overall experience within the urban setting?

6. How did teaching in the urban setting alter your view of the educational system?

Probe: What positive experiences, if any, have you had with teaching in the urban setting?

Probe: Can you describe an example?

#### *The Decision to Leave Urban Education*

1. Would you say that you felt effective as a teacher? In what ways did you or did you not feel effective?
2. How would you describe the level of trust you felt between you and your co-workers?  
Between you and your students? Between you and your boss?
3. What changes would you like to see in urban education?
4. How do you feel about your decision to leave the urban setting?
5. Where did you go or what did you do after you left urban education?



6. Is there anything else related to this topic you would like to add?
7. Is it alright to do a follow-up interview through e-mail or phone, if needed?

## **APPENDIX D E-mail Communication to Administrators**

Letter seeking participants for the following study:  
An investigation of the decision-making process behind teachers' decisions to leave the urban education setting within metropolitan Detroit, post 2009.

Melissa Holtzhouse  
Liberty University  
Department of Education

Dear Sir or Madam:

My name is Melissa Holtzhouse, and I am a doctoral student conducting a research study of that is trying to understand the decision-making process behind teachers' decisions to leave the urban education setting within metropolitan Detroit, post 2009. You were contacted as a possible means of obtaining potential participants who fit the following description:

- (a) Those who taught in the urban setting and left said setting post 2009
- (b) Those who have taught in the urban setting within metropolitan Detroit for a minimum of two years
- (c) Master teachers with four or more years of teaching experience in the urban setting within metropolitan Detroit
- (d) Novice teachers with two to three years of teaching experience in the urban setting within metropolitan Detroit
- (e) Both female and male teachers
- (f) Teachers with varying ethnicities, including, but not limited to, Caucasian and African American
- (g) Teachers who taught in either a general education or self-contained classroom
- (h) Teachers who did not leave for the following reasons: wanting to raise a family, school budget cuts, teacher ineffectiveness, or disciplinary reasons.
- (i) Co-teachers are permitted.

This study is being conducted by: Melissa Holtzhouse (Liberty University Doctoral Candidate) for completion of the dissertation required by the Ed.D. program in Curriculum and Instruction.

### **Background Information**

The purpose of this study is to understand the decision-making process of teachers who left the urban setting in metropolitan Detroit since the economic decline of 2009.

### **Procedures:**

If you agree to provide information regarding potential participants, I would ask you to do the following thing: Respond to this e-mail with the name(s) of potential participants along with their phone number and/or e-mail.

### **Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:**

There is minimal risk to you, the administrator, the potential participants, and all involved in acquiring the names of potential participants. Should you provide the names of participants, I will let them know that I received their name(s) from you.

The benefits to providing names of potential participants are giving a means to potential information that will provide information to principals such as yourself, college and university personnel, researchers, and possibly policymakers about multiple ways to improve areas in urban education.

**Compensation:**

Since the nature of this study is to help expand research on urban education and improve its status in academia, participants will not be compensated.

**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- The schools, participants, and any other names disclosed during the study will receive pseudonyms.
- All data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. All digital data will be password protected.
- All data will be destroyed through permanent deletion (digital) or shredding (physical) after three years of the study's completion.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to provide potential participant contact information will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or your current/past employment.

**Contacts and Questions:**

The local researcher conducting this study is: Melissa Holtzhouse. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact this person at or the Committee Chair, Dr. Deanna L. Keith, at

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher or Committee Chair, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

*You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.*

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to provide names of potential participants to Melissa Holtzhouse for this study.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Participant)

**APPENDIX E Face-to-Face and Phone Communication**

Face-to-Face or Phone Script for Participant Contact Regarding:  
An investigation of the decision-making process behind teachers' decisions to leave the urban education setting within metropolitan Detroit, post 2009.

Melissa Holtzhouse  
Liberty University  
Department of Education

"You are invited to be in a research study of that is trying to understand the decision-making process behind teachers' decisions to leave the urban education setting within metropolitan Detroit, post 2009. You were selected as a possible participant because you have left the urban setting within metropolitan Detroit during the timeframe specified. May I please have your e-mail or home address in order to send you more information? This form provides further information about the study including your role as a participant. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. Should you agree to this study, this form also serves as a consent form which I ask you to sign and mail to me, either through mail or as an attachment to e-mail."

"Thank you for your consideration. May I contact you within the next two days to see if you have any follow-up questions? I look forward to speaking with you."

## **APPENDIX F E-mail Communication to Potential Participants**

### **Consent Form Regarding:**

An investigation of the decision-making process behind teachers' decisions to leave the urban education setting within metropolitan Detroit, post 2009.

Melissa Holtzhouse  
Liberty University  
Department of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of that is trying to understand the decision-making process behind teachers' decisions to leave the urban education setting within metropolitan Detroit, post 2009. You were selected as a possible participant because you have left the urban setting within metropolitan Detroit during the timeframe specified. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Melissa Holtzhouse (Liberty University Doctoral Candidate) for completion of the dissertation required by the Ed.D. program in Curriculum and Instruction.

### **Background Information**

The purpose of this study is to understand the decision-making process of teachers who left the urban setting in metropolitan Detroit since the economic decline of 2009.

### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things: (1) Participate in an audio and video recorded focus group (approximately 2 hours) in which I would hold a discussion with Q&A regarding experiences of teaching in the urban setting within metropolitan Detroit, (2) participate in one or more audiotaped individual interviews in which you could provide further information regarding your experiences of teaching in the urban setting and your decision-making process to leave that setting, and (3) provide any written documents such as e-mails or journals that would help me understand your decision-making process to leave the urban setting within metropolitan Detroit.

### **Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:**

Due to past administrators not being present, and all participants having experienced the same phenomenon (leaving the urban elementary education setting within metropolitan Detroit) there is minimal risk that you will change your responses. The additional incorporation of individual interviews will allow you to share information that you either were not able to share or felt uncomfortable sharing within a focus group.

The benefits to participation are being part of a study that will provide information to principals, college and university personnel, researchers, and possibly policymakers about multiple ways to improve areas in urban education.

### **Compensation:**

Since the nature of this study is to help expand research on urban education and improve its status in academia, participants will not be compensated.

**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- The schools, participants, and any other names disclosed during the study will receive pseudonyms.
- All data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. All digital data will be password protected.
- All data will be destroyed through permanent deletion (digital) or shredding (physical) after three years of the study's completion.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or your current/past employment. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**Contacts and Questions:**

The local researcher conducting this study is: Melissa Holtzhouse. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact this person at \_\_\_\_\_ or the Committee Chair, Dr. Deanna L. Keith, at \_\_\_\_\_

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher or Committee Chair, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

*You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.*

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study according to the following interview guidelines:

- ☐ I will allow the interviews to be taped for later transcription.
- ☐ I will allow the interviews but do not want them taped.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Participant)

Signature of Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*How to Withdraw from the Study*

Should you wish to withdraw from the study, please notify me in writing of your intent to withdraw. You can e-mail this request to me at \_\_\_\_\_ Should you withdraw, please include reasons why you chose to no longer participate.

## APPENDIX G Focus Group Interview Template

### **Focus Group**

“Thank you for agreeing to this focus group and allowing me to audio- and videotape it for later review.”

(Prompts: “Tell me more...”, “Can you elaborate on that...”, “Why do you think...”, “Why did you state...”

### *Urban Education in Retrospect*

1. Why did you decide to become a teacher?
2. What would you describe as the main reason you held for leaving the urban setting?
3. In your opinion, what are the necessary qualifications for an urban school to be effective?
4. How well do you feel that your teacher preparatory program prepared you for the urban environment?
5. Teachers new to a district are generally assigned a mentor teacher. How would you describe the mentoring relationship, either as the mentor or the mentee, if this pertains to your experience in the urban setting?
6. Professional development/learning courses are often required for certification purposes. What courses were offered in order to hone your pedagogy?  
Probe: How would you describe these courses and their outcome?
7. Is there anything else related to this topic you would like to add?
8. Is it alright to do a follow-up interview via email or phone, if needed?

## APPENDIX H Individual Interview Template

### **Individual**

“Thank you for agreeing to this interview and allowing me to audiotape it for later review.”

(Prompts: “Tell me more...”, “Can you elaborate on that...”, “Why do you think...”, “Why did you state...”

#### *The Decision to Enter Education*

7. During the focus group, you answered the question about why you decided to become a teacher. Would you like to expand on your answer?
8. How long did you teach in the urban setting?
9. What grade(s) did you teach?
10. What factors led you to teach in the urban setting?
11. How would you describe your philosophy of teaching?

Probe: How did your philosophy impact or negate your overall experience within the urban setting?

12. How did teaching in the urban setting alter your view of the educational system?

Probe: What positive experiences, if any, have you had with teaching in the urban setting?

Probe: Can you describe an example?

#### *The Decision to Leave Urban Education*

8. Would you say that you felt effective as a teacher? In what ways did you or did you not feel effective?
9. How would you describe the level of trust you felt between you and your co-workers?  
Between you and your students? Between you and your boss?
10. What changes would you like to see in urban education?
11. How do you feel about your decision to leave the urban setting?



12. Where did you go or what did you do after you left urban education?
13. Is there anything else related to this topic you would like to add?
14. Is it alright to do a follow-up interview through e-mail or phone, if needed?

## **APPENDIX I Methodology Procedures**

1. Secure approval to conduct research from Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB).
2. \*Conduct a pilot study.
3. Contact urban school administrators within metropolitan Detroit to secure potential participants via letter (see Appendix F) or contact potential participants who were referred by others (see Appendix G, H, or I).
4. Contact potential participants via e-mail, phone, or letter (see Appendices G, H, and I).
5. \*Conduct a focus group.
6. \*Interview each individual participant.
7. \*Collect copies of documents such as e-mails and journals, if available.
8. \*Conduct a follow-up interview, if necessary, with each individual participant.
9. Conduct member checks.

\*All data will be analyzed as they are collected.

**APPENDIX J Artifact Collection Checklist**

- ☐ Journals
- ☐ E-mails
- ☐ Member checks

## **APPENDIX K Researcher's Journal Excerpt**

February 16, 2016

I met with Beth today. Beth was the second of two individuals to participate in my Pilot Study. I appreciated the candidness of Beth's responses. It was difficult not to get caught up in the negative emotions she so clearly felt. I had to constantly remind myself to remain objective, and not ask any leading questions.

Beth's responses indicated that she appreciates honesty and integrity, two characteristics she found greatly lacking in her urban experience of close to a decade. Beth found that she couldn't always trust her students, or the administration. On the part of the students, the lack of trust Beth felt pertained to behavior choices. With administration, she was fed up with leaders who said the right things, but didn't back their statements with action. Beth felt that money drove the decisions. It almost seemed as though her administration was greedy and uncaring; that even if funding were not an issue, they would somehow make it one and put the money in all of the wrong places, i.e., their pockets.

Beth felt completely overworked and underappreciated. She was tired of the seemingly constant introduction of new initiatives. As soon as she felt somewhat confident with one program, another was introduced, always with a shortage of sufficient training. Beth also felt that her hands were tied, almost as if she were a robot with no voice of her own. She felt as though her intelligence was insulted and that her education and training meant nothing. I was saddened to see Beth feel she couldn't appreciate students as individuals, rather than a shell to be molded. As the line in the famous song goes, "Another one bites the dust." America's realm of urban education lost another great teacher.

November 9, 2016

Today I had the privilege of interviewing Fredrick. I admired Fredrick for his tenacity. He continually sought ways to build a rapport with his students and their families. That's not something I recall experiencing from my years in High School, nor would expect to see from most anyone at that level.

Fredrick was one of a few participants who had job-related health problems. In fact, his doctor advised that he find ways to cut back on stress. Fredrick found that a cut in pay was better than subjecting himself to the demands of the job. It's sad, because he was well-liked by students and received accolades from administration. What is wrong with this system? I find it infuriating that good, caring teachers are beaten down. What will it take for things to change?