

**Black Teachers in Urban Schools: Why do they Stay?**

by

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## Abstract

Academic achievement for students, specifically students of color, is negatively affected when teacher turnover in urban schools continue to rise (Ng & Peter, 2010; Ronfeldt, Lowb, & Wyckoff, 2013). Therefore, the goal of this research was to investigate the lived experiences of Black teachers in predominantly Black population, urban schools who remain in the profession beyond five years. Research initiatives have shown that high-quality teachers in hard to staff schools have the most significant impact on student achievement (Amrein-Beardsley, 2012; Clotfelter et al., 2010). These schools are often revolving door institution for novice teachers who lack the experience and professional development to make the needed difference in the lives of children of poverty, many of whom identify as students of color (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vidgor, 2005; Sass, Hannaway, Xu, Figlio, & Feng, 2012). However, there is a group of individuals who remain committed to high-poverty, students of color in urban schools. This research revealed insight into the experiences of Black teachers using critical race theory as a framework and using narrative inquiry as the methodology. Current research for the retention of teachers reflect that more Black teachers are choosing teaching as a profession. However, these teachers have not remained in the profession (Ahmad & Boser, 2014). Based on the findings of this study, more than half of the teachers who participated determined, prior to the study, to transition from the classroom and had made preparations by actively seeking other employment opportunities. None of the participants shared whether they had received or accepted offers for other employment. They noted their intention to transition from the classroom was to pursue opportunities for advancement or enter private business in other education related areas where they can make a difference in administrative and policy decisions that impact students of color. All of the participants, at the time of this study, remained as classroom teachers. In response to

the overarching question of why they remain, the findings indicated that despite institutional barriers found in organizational structures that devalue their contributions, social alienation and marginalization in policy/curricular discussions and decisions, they remained for their students; to make a difference. The participants' responses from interviews identified themes that did support their decisions to remain in teaching. Among these themes are building relationships through connectedness with students and parents, personally identifying with the struggles as well as the cultural nuances of their students, and the opportunity to advocate for increased awareness of subtle and overt racist practices that undergird belief systems of low expectations for students of color which have all created gaps in academic achievement.

The implications of this study revealed the growing concerns for educational administrators to address issues supporting social justice practices and culturally responsive pedagogy. In addition, school systems should focus in creating safe spaces for discussions of race and race-related issues that address hostile working environments as reflected in the findings of this study to support retaining teachers of color in urban, high poverty schools.

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achieve my dream of becoming a teacher, each parent, although neither graduated from high school, instilled in me a love for learning and a determination to follow my dreams.

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## List of Abbreviations

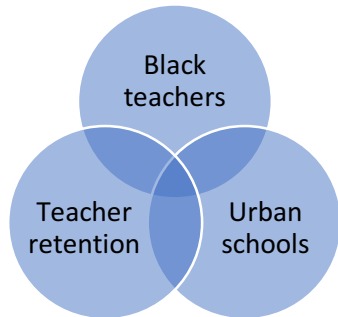
CRT	Critical Race Theory
NAACP	National Association of Advancement of Colored People
CLS	Critical Legal Studies
PD	Professional Development

## Chapter I: Introduction

Teachers enter the profession of education, looking to make a difference in the lives of children particularly those with whom they can closely identify. In this research, I attempted to investigate the lived experiences of Black teachers in urban schools who remain in the profession beyond five years. Those teachers who remain in the profession and in urban schools have found ways to be successful in their professional practices. To make this connection and ensure success in education for all students, teachers have sought through various strategies to support culturally responsive curriculum that offer opportunities for social justice in the communities they serve (Borrero, Florest, & De la Cruz, 2016; Kohli & Pizarro, 2016). They champion social justice through their pedagogy practices, their classroom management (not just the behavioral discipline but also the academic discipline), and through their personal experiences embedded in their instructional practices (Borrero et al., 2016).

This research was guided by critical race theory. By focusing on the framework of critical race theory (CRT), specifically the tenets of race matters and storytelling/counterstorytelling and through a narrative inquiry approach to garner the experiences of Black teachers, the research attempted to address the challenge as Ladson-Billings (1998) cautioned, “Adopting and adapting CRT as a framework for educational equity means that we will have to expose racism in education *and* propose radical solutions for addressing it” (p. 22). Through a narrative inquiry approach, Black teachers, through their experiences, spoke to their realities of racism in education with the hope of leading to changes in educational practices. Critical Race Theory provided the undergirding needed for focus in addressing lived experiences of Black teachers as they relate to racism and inequitable practices in education.

As noted in the figure below, the intersection of Black teachers, urban schools, and teacher retention are interdependent and serve as a model for the quest to find reasons for retaining Black teachers in urban schools. Because of this interdependence, the impact of the lived experiences of Black teachers is essential in challenging the established educational story of the dominant race.



*Figure 1.* Model of convergence of factors overlapping retention of Black teachers

In addition, this model represented the current trend in research into teacher retention. It reflects, as a visual display, the convergence of factors that overlap to pinpoint focal idea for perspectives of Black teachers. Specifically, the model details gleaned from the three different areas of research (i.e., Black teachers, teacher retention, and urban schools) to determine reasons for Black teachers' interest in public, predominantly Black population, urban schools.

### **Problem**

Teacher turnover rates in urban schools continue to rise. Teachers in general, are leaving the profession. Black teachers in urban schools are underrepresented in school systems (Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton, & Freitas, 2010; Kohli & Pizarro, 2016). Recent research in retention identified that Black teachers are leaving the profession at higher rates than White teachers, particularly in public, predominantly Black population, urban schools (Ingersoll, & May, 2011; Ahmad & Boser, 2014). Addressing the reasons for leaving is paramount to stem the

tide of turnover particularly in predominantly Black population, urban schools. I found a gap in the research with reference to understanding reasons for retention for Black teachers. My research delved into the lived experiences of Black teachers who chose to remain in the profession and in urban schools. Lived experiences of Black teachers told through their own voices support the tenet of race matters (issues of race) through the lens of Critical Race Theory. As research indicates that more Black teachers are leaving the profession, I offer that race matters or issues of race reflect historical institutional barriers in understanding experiences that differ from the dominant culture. In an effort to address the challenge of how education should address racism set forth by Ladson-Billings (1998), I attempted to explain the need for understanding the culture and climate of the evolution of schools and schooling in America. Since the Supreme Court's decision in Plessy vs. Ferguson (1896) included public education in its legalization for the "separate but equal" policy, public education for Black students became accessible but within limits as described by local school boards and agents of state education departments. Within these mandates, officials provided a complete separation in educational practices and offerings for students of color. Equal access became the terminology for students of all races in obtaining the opportunity to an education.

However, with the undertaking of the members of the NAACP and through the landmark decision of Brown vs. Board of Education, the supreme court overturned the "separate but equal" policy and required immediate desegregation of public schools "with all deliberate speed" (Warren, 1954). The task of integration met with many upheavals and blatant violence, public outcry, and extreme hostility toward people of color. This court decision changed the fabric of public education for students of color. It also had a tremendous impact on the way education was perceived, delivered, and accepted by Black teachers. According to Bell (1980), considered a

pioneer in the field of Critical Legal Studies, this decision by the supreme court had far more impact on the educational system for Black teachers than first realized. DeCuir and Dixson (2004) explain Derrick Bell's argument that the gains of the Brown decision created a halt in advances for Black teachers. Educators of color faced a backlash from this decision directly in economic, social, and political standing. Black teachers were unemployed as students integrated into public schools where White children attended, and White educators presided. The culture and climate for education for students of color changed as fewer Black teachers were in the integrated schools. These teachers had little influence on the curriculum, delivery of instruction, or financial decisions in public education (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004).

Yet, there are Black teachers who chose to remain with students in the field despite challenges outlined by Bell. It is their stories, their experiences that this research sought to explore and report.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of my research was to examine the experiences of Black teachers in urban schools to determine the reasons for remaining. As experiences are the backbone of this study, the Black teachers' lived stories was told in their words. A narrative inquiry approach allowed them to express thoughts, concerns, and desires that may or may not factor in their decisions to remain with students in urban schools. My research study attempted to gather the story.

### **Research Question**

Through the lens of Critical Race Theory, my research sought to identify how race matters to Black teachers in urban schools. I chose to seek out Black teachers' stories to determine whether their stories were reflective of the challenges of teaching in urban schools by all teachers or was their story unique to Black teachers. I wanted to know if their experiences



were a recurring theme of marginalization and alienation; if they experienced opportunities for professional growth in a safe space for addressing race related concerns in educational practices or were there institutional practices that impeded them in a social justice quest. The questions for my research were in the categories commonly assigned to the framework of CRT. With the guiding tenets of race matters, storytelling, and counter storytelling, my research further investigated these questions:

- How do Black teachers see themselves in the role of education?
- What specific practices told through their stories support them in remaining in urban schools?
- How do organizational contexts show up in the stories of Black teachers choosing to remain in high-poverty, urban schools?

The challenges in educating students for ensuring support in the curriculum that meets the needs of our growing society, both current and into the future remain a focal point for educators. Innovation and creativity continue to be unique identifiers for the advancement of knowledge and challenges to the status quo. A system of evaluation and synthesis in knowledge evolve into new knowledge that propel learners to advancement. However, to advance successfully, understanding of the context and history of the need for advancement remain crucial to addressing the current needs of all students today and into the future. As noted by Bell (1980) in his explanation of interest convergence and property rights as tenets of Critical Race Theory, the system of education historically has been driven by the needs of society in advancement, supported mainly by the dominant cultures' expectations and definitions of success. However, marginalized groups' ideologies and cultural contributions were often outliers to the goals of education. When the interest of the dominant culture converged with social justice

for nondominant groups, only then did society proposed changes offered by Bell (1980).

Moving toward a more equitable future in educational opportunities inclusive of all cultures, it becomes necessary to retrace our goals for all students and reexamine motives for success.

Issues related to race and cultural responsiveness in pedagogy and curriculum are necessary to address the continual marginalization of nondominant groups. Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006) argued for the need to address race as it is interwoven into our social structures and its impact on educational reform through uncovering and analyzing its cultural significance. Our educational system is permeated with an underlying supposition of low expectations (Matias, 2016) for nondominant groups of students or as Delpit (1988) defines it, the culture of power and hidden codes. This same supposition is accepted based on factors of socioeconomic status, race relations, and geographic locations. Black teachers may have indeed embarked upon this continual argument that race does have an impact on the educational system outcomes for all students (Collins, 1992; Huber et al, 2006).

The second research question explored storytelling and counter-storytelling as a form of pedagogy. Delgado and Stefancic (2017) explained the use of storytelling as a starting point for conversations that can lead to policy changes and corrections to our belief systems through the use of stories not part of the dominant culture and also redirect our focus from onesidedness to a collective society approach. As society grows, our system of education and meeting the needs of all learners must also evolve. However, marginalized groups continue to compete with the dominant beliefs and structures for educational goals and outcomes. Lipman (1985) found in her study of the restructure of a school and school system that culturally responsive teachers input is crucial to the success of students of color due to their unique expertise in cultural knowledge as well as submitting a different perspective from the dominant cultures' perspective and practices.

However, in her assessment of the outcome of the efforts to readdress the educational needs of this one school system, she reflected on the loss of opportunity for students and teachers in the conversation when their stories held no influence on the decisions for restructuring. Addressing the perspectives and hearing the stories of those directly affected and impacted in the conversation of race relations in education and proposed delivery of instruction for all students is essential to alternative approaches that support the uniqueness of marginalized groups in America. Just as Crenshaw (1995) explained that experiences in race related issues can be told from an outsider point of view and neither can educational reform be implemented from distance and objectivity but must be inclusive of cultural responsiveness.

Finally, the third research question addressed Bell's (1992) idea in CRT of interest convergence and property rights. Black teachers identify with students of color based on personal experiences and the desire to make better or provide opportunities. In an ever-evolving world, educational initiatives and political agendas more often than not determine areas of interest and focus both for curriculum and financial distribution. To be able to address curricular issues that affect student achievement, Black teachers face an adverse situation that requires them to address their ideologies and that of the institution. Delgado and Stefancic (2017) expressed in their research Derrick Bell's argument concerning the perceived tug of war between civil rights advances and political agendas of the dominant race that placed Black people in the middle (p. 22). As education historically is situated in political discussions based on economic laws that fund these services through property taxes, the argument for curriculum and resource allocations continual to be an issue hotly debated. The question of whose rights have more value is often a dilemma when financial resources are scarce. Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006) discuss property rights and interest convergence by stating, "In the simplest of equations, those with "better"

property are entitled to “better” schools” (p. 54). They further explain that the need for material resources to support educational opportunities such as required tools for advanced learning found in more affluent communities often do not exist in more impoverished communities due to lack of resources (p. 54).

### **Research Design/Methodology**

This paper addressed those teachers who defy the statistics and remain in the profession, specifically in public, urban schools, using a narrative approach in qualitative research. Through individual interviews, the research examined the role of such teachers, their lived experiences, and their insights into their course of successfully negotiating the maze of educational politics to educate the whole child. Guided through the lens of CRT and precisely the tenets of race matters and storytelling and counter storytelling, this qualitative narrative study examined the experiences of Black teachers on retention in public, urban schools in Southeast Alabama. Furthermore, this study should help guide a focus for further studies on how educator programs can support sustaining high-quality educators, particularly Black teachers, in public urban schools.

Using a narrative inquiry approach to this research and the lens of the tenets of CRT, this research examined race and why it matters in education from Black teachers in their own words. It addressed the dominance of race in U.S. culture. Through narrative inquiry and CRT, storytelling and counter-storytelling guide the focus on the impact of race in educational practices and the impact on individuals in the educational structure. A narrative inquiry viewpoint lend itself to personalizing the perspectives of educating all students. It is equally important to address the tenet of property rights, as seen through the experiences of Black teachers. Regarding financial resources and socio-economic status of students in public urban

schools, the division between the “haves” and the “have nots” present itself as obstacles for Black teachers particularly with few up to date technologies or skilled technicians, advanced course offerings due to teacher shortages, and lack of community resources to offset rising costs for up to date school facilities.

### **Rationale and Significance**

Education has changed tremendously over the last several decades. The fabric of the educational system faces challenges to cohesiveness and continuity. The stability of public education remains with the educators who dedicate their lives to the purpose and goal of preparing the next generation. Hearing the perspectives from Black teachers in their experiences as they navigate through the system of education is essential for determining an approach for addressing the retention of teachers in urban schools. Despite the obstacles Black teachers face in addressing race and inequity of resources, many have found ways to reach out to their community, gain support, and remain in the field. The benefits of knowing their stories and experience the their determination were the goals of this research and should guide future research in focusing attention on why they stay in the profession. Through the challenges of lack of resources, inequity in practices, low expectations based on socioeconomic status identifications, improper labeling for special education services, I add my voice to challenge inconsistencies in educational practices for all students, particularly students of color. I must agree with Ladson-Billings (1998) as she expressed the challenges of addressing racism in educational practices, specifically using Critical Race Theory is uncomfortable and may be to some an upheaval to the serenity of the educational field. Because this approach is unfavorable in the dominant culture design to teaching and learning, any suggestions to the contrary may be met with balant refusal and outright opposition to those who dare to express the need for educational

equity (p. 22-23).

### **Role of the Researcher**

First and foremost, I am a teacher. I am an educator. I am a teacher of color whose 24 years of experience embeds bias in this research. I served as the principal in high-poverty, urban, and predominantly minority school in the deep South. My experiences are interwoven into the spirit of this research as I delve deeper into my own bias. I have struggled with separating the research from myself and my own experiences, my passion, and my desires as a teacher of color. I have found myself increasingly in a struggle for identity within the realm of the educational system where I work, challenging passionately, my desires to address the barriers I felt, feel, and face as I attempt to “educate the whole child” in a predominantly Black student population, public urban elementary school. Oftentimes I have felt alienated in my quest to educate children. I have screamed with frustration in being marginalized in the profession. I have experienced feelings of being devalued as a professional other than representing diversity but no real input to the decisions that affect teaching and learning. I have experienced limited access to any meaningful resources to support education. Yet I persevered, even though I felt set up for failure. I am inclined to believe that challenging the status quo is a basis for understanding the “why” Black teachers remain in teaching mainly in public city schools. It is through my own pedagogical, lived experiences that I perceive myself as a champion for social justice.

My theoretical viewpoint for this dissertation is rooted in Critical Race Theory (CRT). This framework guides this research and challenges my preconceptions of race and how race matters. In reassessing the dominant culture’s pedagogy practices, I find myself reevaluating the significance education plays in economic status of students of color. I question the inequitable distribution of resources that undergird low expectations for students of color in public schools.

In research, I am driven to discover how Black teachers can remain true to themselves and their cultural perspectives in education. I wonder how gender, specifically Black male teachers experiences equate to the frustrations I felt and feel in this profession. Yet, I remain in the profession to make a difference.

### **Assumptions**

Using Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a framework for understanding and gaining knowledge of lived experiences prove to be a challenge. The challenges of addressing claims of focusing on the negativity of society rather than the gains afforded by civil rights legislations and the challenge of a counterstorytelling based on personal experiences that offer a different perspective to mainstream thought and ideologies. These ideas are explained in detail in Richard Delgado's work on Critical Race Theory (Delgado, 2017). The topic of race draws uncomfortable experiences and negative connotations from many stakeholders. Because these discussions have the potential for revealing raw and real personal experiences, it was assumed that through their lived experiences, their pedagogical experiences and the impact these experiences have had both on themselves as a Black teacher and the students they serve in the school system in which they are employed, the data would reflect an underlying idea found in each individual story and collectively as a group. The assumption that all interviews would reflect lived experiences from participants in public city schools was paramount in gaining knowledge to support the purpose of the study and to identify needs for future research in this area. In addition I assumed there could be a possibility of emergent themes not identified in the literature review and that participants would feel free to discuss their experiences with the me, who also identifies as Black, reveal the need for further research. Storytelling and counter storytelling associated with CRT were used as an approach to reveal racist practices and the

impact on individuals in the educational structure (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Delgado 2017). Crafting a narrative by individuals would be the sincerest method of ascertaining lived experiences told by individuals as their reality. Counterstorytelling as a narrative to these experiences did offer another viewpoint to experiences. The use of a narrative approach in qualitative research was necessary to understand the personal experiences of participants and their reasons for retention.

### **Delimitations**

This study encompassed a participant pool found in one city school system in Southeast Alabama. Participants selected were from a selection of volunteer, interested candidates who have remained in the profession as Black teachers in public urban schools. They were identified by responses to requests to participate based on their experiences with the central theme of the impact of race on the retention of Black teachers. The research design was determined based on participant interest as outlined in the Auburn University Institutional Review Board approval.

### **Organization**

Critical Race Theory served as the focus in understanding the reasons Black teachers remained in public city schools. In chapter one, I explained how focusing on two of the tenets of CRT i.e. race matters and storytelling/counterstorytelling were guides for researching lived experiences of Black teachers. In the evolution of research in this theoretical framework, the ideas proposed by Derrick Bell (2017) of property rights and interest conversion undergirded an inquiry into Black teachers' desires to make a difference for students of color. Chapter two, the literature review, situated the research question in the current literature. Driven by research in the retention of teachers, retention of Black teachers, and retention of teachers in public urban schools the literature review delved deeply into reasons for their intent to remain. Chapter three



outlines the research methods used in the study. As qualitative research using a narrative approach, interviews as data source drew an analysis of Black teachers point of view. This analysis was based on developing answers to the research question and rooted in Critical Race Theory. Chapter four highlights the findings and includes identification, a discussion, and implications for future research in this area. Finally, chapter five, the conclusion, includes a summation of the research question and methodology in analyzing data.

## Chapter II: Literature Review

Dixson, et.al (2006) stated “... the stories of people of color are hopeful, even when our circumstances are not” (p. 82). My intent in utilizing Critical Race Theory as a framework for this study is to draw attention to the historical trend in ways which racism is intertwined in the organizational structures of the educational system. Specifically, I want to address the adverse effect of institutional barriers based on racist practices that undermine retention efforts for Black teachers in the profession. In this study, I outline my thesis through a focus on the tenets of critical race theory i.e. race matters, the permanence of race, interest convergence and Whiteness as property rights and story telling/counter story telling. In addition, I wanted to focus on the critique of liberalism in relation to the impact of internalized racism (Huber et al., 2006; Kohli, 2014), the notion of colorblindness (Delpit, 1988, Matias, 2016), and the crippling effect of incremental change (Dixson, et al, 2006).

Black teachers in urban schools are underrepresented in school systems (Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton, & Freitas, 2010; Kohli & Pizarro, 2016). Research on the need for more teachers of color in schools is a recurring theme among educational researchers (Lewis, 1996; Loehr, 1988; Villegas & Irvine, 2010). High-poverty schools in challenging urban areas continue to have teacher turnover (Amrein-Beardsley, 2007; Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2010; Guin, 2004; Jacob, 2007; Kohli & Pizarro, 2016; Petty, Fitchett, & O’Conner, 2012). However, some Black teachers have remained in the profession and these schools. Gaining insight into their stories and their experiences to identify themes for retention of Black teachers provided a basis for discussions in support of student achievement.

## **Equal Access to educational resources both human and property**

Initiatives to stem the tide of teacher turnover in urban, high-poverty schools have grown as attention has been drawn to economic disparities, lack of equal access in educational opportunities, and widening gaps in achievement rates among subgroups. Through these initiatives, the federal government and educational institutions spotlighted the need for diversity in education among the teaching workforce (Ahmad and Boser, 2014). However, the educational system remain majority White, middle-class, and female whose perspectives and experiences differ significantly from the students of whom they teach in public city schools. The challenge remain with the need for recruitment and retention of quality teachers if the goal of equitable education for all students be met. A stable workforce is the hallmark of any economy for success. Stability in these schools is paramount for success. Therefore, educators must focus on why Black teachers remain in hard to staff schools.

Common factors, although not an exhaustive list, that support retention identified in educational research include supportive leadership, culturally relevant curriculum, freedom of expression or advocacy for justice, and a sense of community particularly with students of color (Farinde, Allen, & Lewis, 2016; Ladd, 2011). Supportive leadership in terms of understanding that diverse cultures have unspoken languages, attributes, and mannerisms reflected in interactions of students of color with Black teachers remained necessary to retention effort. Validation of these traits by leadership and support in attaining resources, sustaining reform initiatives, and professional development that aligned with best practices for teaching diverse populations carry much weight with Black teachers' decisions in retention. In addition, exercising the freedom to advocate for justice and networking as a community are identified as desires of teachers of color. It was crucial to address the reasons for the retention of Black

teachers and hear their stories in their own words. As the turnover rate among novice teachers within 3- to 5-year span particularly in urban, low performing schools increase, educators must act swiftly to address this issue.

**Interest Convergence and Whiteness as property rights.** Based on Bell's (1980) work, when the interests of the dominant culture collide with the interests of non-dominant cultures, then will efforts be made to remedy the issue of inequity. In addressing this tenet, I looked to research that support the idea that high quality teachers help close achievement gaps for students. My attempt to address the definition of high quality teachers found roots in the question of what value added do teachers of color offer. In addition, in review of the literature, I noted the effectiveness of teachers in predominantly Black schools and those in affluent schools held little difference. Teachers who enter the profession do so with the intent of making a difference. It was through their insights that they develop support for the challenges of teaching. The successes of Black teachers who remain in public city schools have been far-reaching with regard to the impact they have on the lives of their students.

**Equal access to high quality teaching.** Through critical race theory lens, equal access to high-quality teaching consistently is imperative for students to experience positive opportunities for success in their lives. High-quality teachers are developed (Darling-Hammond & Barate-Snowden, 2007; Looney, 2011). This development, honed within the first three years of practice, establishes sound pedagogical practices for improving student achievement. However, with the constant turnover of teachers in urban, hard to staff schools, students were in constant upheaval and do not always have access to high-quality teachers and instructional practices. General practice for these schools has traditionally been to assign the newest teachers to the profession in low performing schools (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vidgor, 2005; Sass, Hannaway,

Xu, Figlio, & Feng, 2012). While these teachers are attempting to learn content and work toward perfecting their teaching acumen, learning gaps for both teacher and student are profound.

Fantilli and McDougall (2009) conducted a study of the experiences of novice teachers in Ontario. The research examined the experiences of new teachers with induction and mentorship programs as part of the new teacher certification requirements. They found several areas of focus similar to the current research in the United States. They concluded with district-level amendments to address and support novice teachers. These amendment addressed hiring practices, specifically using strategies to allow novice teachers ample time to prepare themselves with taking on the role of teacher at a school. This time would be spent for the purpose of familiarizing themselves with content, curriculum, and logistics (differentiated instruction, varied teaching methods to address learning modalities) of the practice of teaching and learning. The authors cited areas districts should and could address such as support for administrators in assigning mentors and training of mentors to address the needs of novice teachers both in practice and in induction to the profession. Clotfelter et al. (2005) found that novice teachers are more likely to be positioned in classrooms with low performing children. In their research, they found that low performing students, many of whom are Black, were taught by novice teachers more than experienced teachers in many school systems in North Carolina. These teachers' lack of experience could be a contribution to the poor performance of students based on accountability measures by state and federal mandates. They concluded their study with suggestions for North Carolina schools and districts to reassess their placement practices to equitably distribute experienced and inexperienced teachers to classrooms where expertise would have an impact on the achievement of students. The need for support for new teachers must be a priority in the retention of teachers.

Academic success for students who enter school well behind their peers regarding educational experiences and knowledge has been dependent upon sustained, consistent instructional practices, particularly with experienced, high-quality teachers (Amrein-Beardsley, 2012; Clotfelter et al., 2010). These teachers' experiences afforded them the ability to adapt to situations that are pertinent to educational practices such as curriculum evolution and have the instructional expertise in identifying best practices strategies in student achievement. According to Amrein-Beardsley (2007), highly qualified teachers or expert teachers "included National Board-Certified teachers, teachers recognized for having extraordinary success in teaching students in high-needs schools, and teachers named Teacher of the Year or Ambassador of the Year" (p. 65). Training and continual support through professional development remained markers for growing high-quality teachers.

**Becoming and supporting the process of a high quality teacher.** For the success of new teachers into the profession, professional development must be specific to their needs, meaningful, and support them utilizing expertise in instructional delivery for a diverse population of learners. Looney (2011) reported that developing high-quality teachers must include a quality teacher evaluation system with support. While understanding that clearly defining high quality differs among educators, she identified various components in recognizing high-quality teachers. The common attributes are: (a) teachers with experience in delivering instruction to students in varying formats, (b) teachers who can address learner needs and outcomes through ongoing formative assessments, (c) teachers who are able to engage students in meaningful learning activities that address various learning styles and modalities, (d) teachers who embody the understanding and ability to differentiate instruction for all students while fostering motivation for learning. Looney (2011) concluded that the use of effective teacher

evaluation systems for improvement both for the teacher and student achievement remained critical. The need for more research in addressing various components of successful evaluation systems continues to grow as educators determine best practices for academic success.

Darling-Hammond and Barate-Snowden (2007) argued that failure to undergird teacher development relegates novice teachers to struggling in their practices rather than effectively supporting learning for themselves and their students. These struggles reflect in poor teaching practices where students are negatively affected (p. 118). Sass et al., (2012) conducted a study to determine the effectiveness of teachers in high-poverty schools and those in low-poverty schools. The results indicated that the differences in student performance in high-poverty schools were largely due to the lowest teacher effectiveness. Yet, high-quality teachers in these schools performed as well as high-quality teachers in low-poverty schools. They found that the least effective teachers in high-poverty schools performed with less effectiveness than their counterparts in low-poverty schools. Their findings suggested that the level of effectiveness for teachers depends largely on the setting where their experience is derived (p. 22). High-performing teachers in high-poverty schools may not have been appreciated for their expertise and experience as they performed as well as their counterparts in low-poverty schools based on overall poor student performance data. Therefore, the authors called for tools in determining effectiveness consider individual teacher contributions rather than a whole school approach when determining the effectiveness of teachers in poor performing schools as opposed to those in high performing schools (p. 23). As research supports, high-quality teachers make a significant difference in closing the achievement gap for students of poverty. Dobbie and Fryer (2009) proposed that high-quality teaching alone was not enough. In their study of the Harlem Children's Zone project, they found that high-quality instruction and curriculum, along with

continuous community involvement and support for children of poverty, have made a difference in closing achievement gaps.

**Hiring and sustaining high quality teachers.** Darling-Hammond (2004) asserted that teachers with inadequate training created conditions that exacerbate low student achievement and potentially led to more teacher dissatisfaction with the profession. She claimed in her research that such situations created an unstable teaching force resulting in a breakdown in professional development for colleagues within the school structure leading to instructional challenges and greater burden for teachers who remain in the building and forced to carry the load of their unsuccessful colleagues (Darling-Hammond, 2004). Teachers who are untrained or inadequately prepared are susceptible to leaving the profession creating a continual cycle of hiring and rehiring, with negative results for students. In addition, when novice teachers leave the profession, the efforts of the experienced teacher led to burn out as they had to “carry” the unqualified, novice teacher. Black teachers faced additional burn out when faced with the challenges of teaching in hard to staff schools. Pabon (2016) reported that Black male educators were “schooled out” of the profession due to demands that were frustrating and unrealistic. In this qualitative study using life history methodology, the author summarized the findings of the themes developed as being lack of adequate preparation in their educational programs and requirements of standardized curriculum that forced feelings of being “devalued as intellectuals and marginalized in school space” (p. 13).

Support for high-quality instruction begin with hiring practices. Essential to success for low performing students has been effective, high-quality teaching. Based on research by Johnson, Kardos, Kauffman, & Donaldson, (2004), there has been a support gap for new teachers in low-income schools. In the areas of hiring, mentoring, and curriculum, new teachers



received less support for success as a teacher than their peers in affluent schools potentially revealing inequities between high-poverty and affluent schools specifically, the need to support high-quality instruction and new teachers in high-poverty schools. New teachers' decisions to remain in the school or profession was contingent upon factors that included growth professionally and the autonomy as professionals in curricular decisions. In their findings, they supported that effective hiring practices should be specific to match the skills and dispositions of teachers with the needs of the position (p. 6). According to Liu and Johnson (2006), often in hard to staff schools, hiring practices are rushed, hiring after school started or during the school term, hired un-credentialed, or hired out of the field or just not a good fit for the position. Therefore, districts should review policies both at the school and district level, train interviewers on effective hiring practices and provide any resources needed to address concerns with displaced or misplaced teachers all in support of placing highly qualified teachers with students especially those who need them most.

**Supply meets demand: working conditions, preparation programs, and support programs.** As the demand for high-quality teachers in challenging schools grow, organizations should pay close attention to the changing role of teachers and what this generation of educators' desire for themselves as teachers (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Lewis 1996) Determining enticements for expert teachers, in general, to transfer to low performing urban schools utilizing substantial salary differential has not always sustainable. However, Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, (2010) called for school systems to look more closely at the distribution of high quality teachers throughout the district and creating a more balanced student distribution school to school as a more favorable approach to ensuring equal access for all students rather than relying on potentially unsustainable salary differentials. In economic terms, according to Jacob (2007),

supply references issues of hiring incentives such as wages or the location of schools to attract highly qualified teachers while demand refers to the human aspect of hiring the best high-quality teachers, as determined by factors such as administrators' knowledge of high-quality teaching practices. Districts should pay special attention to factors that entice high quality teachers to schools and plan accordingly when determining distribution throughout the district.

From an economic standpoint, districts must decide through data analysis the cost effectiveness of teacher turnover. Sedivy-Benton & Boden-McGill (2012) conducted a study to analyze data in an effort to understand factors in the cost of teacher turnover and school environment on retention. From the study, using analysis data from the most recent School and Staffing Survey (SASS) from the National Center for Education Statistics, the authors found that in general, work and learning environments do factor into a teachers' decision to remain in the profession or school. Their analysis of the data results identified that most of the teachers in the study were determined to remain in the profession. The analysis of the data also revealed that determinations to remain for teachers was the level of a supportive environment, influence in their schools, and control in their environment. Based on this research, a possible solution for minimizing teacher turnover, policymakers and administrators should pay close attention to the working conditions and culture of schools. Their goal was to address issues that can be immediately addressed by administrators and school districts in support of teacher retention.

As districts analyze data on cost effectiveness, attention to teacher effectiveness is paramount in student achievement. Steele, Pepper, Springer, Lockwood (2015) conducted a study to determine whether teachers of high-poverty schools were less effective at improving student achievement levels than teachers of low-poverty schools. They found that the best teachers in high-poverty schools were just as successful in improving student achievement

performances as their counterparts in low-poverty schools. Based on their analysis, the distribution of teachers with high value-added for student achievement was unequal among schools within the district. Students in high-poverty schools were more likely to have less access to high value-added teachers, i.e., those with advanced degrees, top performers in their educator preparation programs, and those who attended competitive schools. The recommendation for districts was to help schools replace teachers who leave with teachers whose value-added will improve student achievement and also address conditions to help the least effective teachers to improve. Unfortunately, for many teachers facing challenges of teaching in urban, high poverty schools without support for both pedagogy and personal fulfillment as educators continued to be detrimental to retention in the profession.

Sustaining teachers in the education profession required closer examination of factors that support longevity. Cochran-Smith (2004) identified these factors as challenging entry requirements to teacher education programs that potentially create barriers for pre-service teachers of color, examining effectiveness of teacher preparation programs and professional development with regard to diversity, the evolution and sustainability of rewards and incentive systems for recruitment and retention along with addressing the culture and condition of the work environment. Wong (2004) submitted that teacher induction programs with meaningful professional development reflecting the mission and goals of the district and schools; sustainable through the novice years yield greater teacher retention than a simple mentoring program. Jackson (2009) also identified what she called a “master teacher mindset” in which teachers train to become master teachers when given the tools to assess themselves and their craft for professional development. She concluded that teachers should look at several areas in teaching as they develop this master teacher mindset. These areas begin and end with student achievement

and teacher development such as start where you students are, support your students, use useful feedback, and focus on quality, not quantity. According to this research, teachers can become master teachers by focusing on these aspects of quality instruction and creating an action plan to guide them. Therefore, it is essential that professional developing teachers will support the sustainability of the teaching force particularly in hard to staff schools.

However, novice teachers left the profession despite the methods used by schools and school districts in recruiting and retaining them. In a recent study by Ahmad and Boser (2014), recruiting Black teachers has been successful. However, they found that conditions for retention have overshadowed the successful initiatives in recruitment. Black teachers left the profession more frequently than their white peers. By studying the perspectives of Black teachers in urban schools who remain, researchers gained an understanding of the support needed to provide a stable workforce in hard to staff schools. Further examination of lived experiences and from the words of Black teachers in high-poverty schools who remain continued to be paramount to challenging perceived ideas and thoughts as to their impact on education.

**Impact of teacher preparation programs.** The hierarchial ideology of dominance in cultural values in educational practices denotes that of the dominant culture over non-dominant cultures as evidenced by research into the impact of teacher preparation programs. Delving more deeply into the retention of Black teachers, Achinstein et al. (2010) found that factors affecting retention can change through policy amendments. According to the authors, retention and recruitment of teachers must address areas that involve changing policy in salaries, interpersonal relationships through changes in working conditions and environments, and autonomy to invest in the cultural relationships within the school community. As noted, researchers agree that the

retention of teachers, particularly Black teachers, must focus more on creating a system for sustainability through policy and influences that include continuous training and development.

Teacher preparation programs have the potential for the greatest impact on Black teachers in urban schools. Kohli and Pizarro (2016) found that Black teachers and institutions that train teachers must focus more on providing opportunities for advancement for Black teachers through various avenues. They asserted that institutions should provide focused professional development in the area of leadership training to support Black teachers commitment to social justice and equity in education. In addition, Waddell (2014) found in qualitative research focusing on a teacher preparation program (the Institute for Urban Education) in a predominantly White university was that Black and Hispanic teachers found this program to be most helpful to them as they prepared for the teaching field in urban schools. Their purpose for this study was to discover ways to support retention of students of color in an urban teacher education program to prepare them to be employed in urban school settings and hard to staff schools. The literature suggested that preservice Black teachers, as compared to their White counterparts, faced many challenges that hinder them from successful completion of programs. From the four emerging themes, i.e. cohort model, focus on diversity, high expectations; and close interaction with faculty, he supports claims that teacher preparation programs must focus on training in culture and the impact of cultural responsive instruction through awareness of teacher perceptions (Waddell, 2014).

Kohli (2008) conducted a study with preservice teachers to focus on the experiences of women of color with cultural biases and racism. The participants described experiences of subtle and overt racism in their educational experiences. The purpose of the research was to gain perspective from women of color on their experiences with racism in education with the intent of

taking lessons learned to address how they would challenge these negative experiences as they entered their classrooms. The author concluded, “Teacher education programs often lack strategies and curriculum that speak to the needs of Black teachers” (Kohli, 2008, p. 187). Therefore, more attention to preservice educational preparation programs with regard to strategies and curriculum must be paramount in providing wholesome educational experiences for all students.

By comparison, Lee (2013) conducted a study to examine the experiences of Black teachers in suburban schools and their perspectives on their own in-school identities. His findings identified three major themes that reflect Black teachers' experiences in suburban schools. This study was done with the implications for teacher education programs to better prepare preservice teachers for the challenges of working in suburban schools. The implications of this study also can be related to similar challenges that Black teachers face in urban schools regarding the feeling of their expertise devalued as a professional, or the feeling of being invisible as a person of color in attempting to fit the mold of the dominant race in the school, and the lack of professional support in culturally relevant teaching. It is from this perspective that this research attempted to hear the stories of these Black teachers in their reasons for remaining in urban, hard to staff schools.

### **Why Race Matters – Committed to Stay, Value Added**

In recent years, race and race-related matters, particularly within educational realms, have pervaded the research. Cornel West (2017) pinpointed in his work that issues of race are rooted in the historical inequities of American society. According to West (2017), until these issues of stereotyping and consistent oppressive ideologies that block Black Americans from equality in all aspects of society, then can we have serious discussions about race. Delving deeply into

educational policies and practices have revealed consistently that race in teaching and learning matters. Black teachers add a richness to educational opportunities of all students not found in pedagogical practices defined by Eurocentric standards that permeate schooling. Scholars continue to research the value-added in teaching and learning by Black teachers. The claim that Black teachers served predominantly as role models for students of color has been refuted in the literature numerous times. Research points out that Black teachers add more value to instruction than identified as role models or cultural brokers (Borrero et al., 2016; Goodwin, 2004). Black teachers add experiences to teaching and learning. They add understanding to cultural barriers that potentially keep the cycle of poverty and underachievement revolving. They embodied social justice issues through their own stories, their instructional practices, and their own experiences as students of color. They also added value to curricular issues in culturally responsive teaching practices. In administrative roles within schools, Black teachers added perspective and insight to policies and procedures in educational equality.

Race matters, especially regarding challenges to the status quo approach in education. The context of schooling has historically marginalized nondominant culture populations. From content taught to development of policies and procedures for governing educational initiatives, marginalized peoples have held little influence in the conversation particularly in whose culture has merit (Dixson, Rousseau, Anderson, & Donnor, 2006). Culturally responsive pedagogy and social justice practices derived from experiences that enhance educational opportunities (Borrero, Flores, & De la Cruz, 2016). However, often these approaches have been seen as contradictory to the majority trend in teaching and learning. Driven by the desire and need to cultivate the next generation of educators in any field supported by teachers, in general, was

escalated among Black teachers in that personal experiences and challenges due to racial barriers continue to be topics of discussion well into the 21st century.

To gain a perspective as to why Black teachers remained in urban schools, researchers must discover reasons for the departure. Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton, & Freitas, (2010) proposed that Black teachers faced barriers to teaching a culturally responsive curriculum that supports the need for community involvement and builds on their purpose for entering the profession. In their review of the literature, they noted that Black teachers reasons for leaving the profession was found in their experiences with attitudes of low expectations for students of color, challenges with acceptance for their desire and teaching practices that were culturally relevant, and the lack of a safe space to discuss race and race related issues in education (p. 90). These are the areas noted in this study as most important to Black teachers. There has been an expressed need for organizational structures to address teachers' needs for the community and to belong in support of professional growth. By the general nature of the school structures, isolation and alienation continued as areas of focus in supporting retention.

Black teachers' stories of retention needed to heard. The need to celebrate their contributions to the educational environment remained essential. Their lived experiences told in their own words gave insight to personal approaches to educating children. Kraft et al. (2012) noted in their qualitative research utilizing case studies and interviews that Black teachers expressed their intentions to remain in urban schools due to their positive relationships with their students. This expression was in contrast with the general research outlining reasons for attrition as the desire to work in less challenging, more affluent, or a different demographic group. While these reasons were noted for teachers leaving, some Black teachers have expressed differently. They further explained these teachers indicated their satisfaction in working in urban schools



allowed them the opportunity to adopt and adapt their educational skills.

**What value did Black teachers bring to schools and school systems.** Villegas and Irvine (2010) argued that support for diversifying the teacher workforce in schools is a pressing need in understanding the value Black teachers bring to schools. They asserted that Black teachers bring to the profession unique cultural experiences and expertise in teaching and learning (p. 179). According to Borrero et al. (2016), Black teachers had a personal connection in teaching practices that are relevant to the experiences of students of color. Goodwin (2004) found in the qualitative study on the value of Black teachers in urban schools, these teachers view themselves and their pedagogical practices differently from their White counterparts. Their remarks outlined culturally responsive teaching as driving factors in their approach to teaching. Among the questions asked of the participants, the researcher found that the value-added to education of students of color in particular by Black teachers was commitment to social justice, culturally responsiveness, and deep caring from experience embedded in the need for community. The participant explained “I see a passion (in European American teacher educators) for producing students who can read and write, but I don’t see a commitment to community transformation” (p. 14). These are the areas noted in this study as most important to Black teachers.

**Internalized Racism.** DeCuir & Dixson, (2004) noted in their research as a tenet of Critical Race Theory a focus on the critique of liberalism. Through this literature review, my focal point was to address the damaging impact of institutional barriers that support racist practices was in relation to the impact of internalized racism (Huber et al., 2006; Kohli, 2014), the notion of colorblindness (Matias, 2016), and the crippling effect of incremental change (Dixson, et al, 2006). In a study conducted to gain an insight into how internalized racism

manifests itself through what the author called "friendly fire" racism, the findings identified that teachers of color unintentionally perpetuated racism among their race. Philip, Rocha, & Olivares-Pasillas (2017) clearly outlined how one teacher in the study who felt that her qualifications first as a teacher of color who identified with her students of color and who had trained in social justice in preservice inadvertently support dominant cultural norms and views of marginalized people, particularly in the Hispanic culture. The conclusions drawn from this research called for the need to prepare teachers better to engage in inquiry through a rich, purposeful dialogue that engages students in deepening their understanding and draw meaning as an approach to addressing racism.

Huber, Johnson, and Kohli's (2006) research focused on defining internalized racism and the school structures that support its existence. Through this research, they defined their purpose by stating their intent for accountability of schools in various capacities from the instructional leaders to the instructional content and delivery of said content, the allocated resources or lack thereof that have all supported negative perceptions of nondominant cultures in public schools. Through a grounded study approach, they outlined the continual practice of racism in schools that undermine equity in education from policy and curriculum development to perceptions of practicing teachers' methodologies. They found that teachers have undergirded these negative perceptions either intentionally or unintentionally. This practice fostered feelings of inadequacy and self-hatred in students' personal growth. It was embedded in the educational system and supported throughout educational practices. Lack of knowledge and skill in guiding discussions of racism within classrooms or fear of reprisal for addressing controversial concerns were underlying factors in this reinforcement of internalized racism.

Huber et al. (2006) further argued that schools perpetuate the message of inferiority of nondominant cultures. In their research, focusing on equity of resources, curriculum standards, and negative perceptions for persons of color implied, the lack of equitably aligning persons of color contributions to society in textbooks, classroom discourse, and students' academic performance supported feelings of negative self-worth. In their findings, they argued that students of color experience internalized racism and develop negative self perceptions when they are alienated in instructional content (p. 201). Marva Collins (1992) argued that students were pushed out of schools rather than drop out due to low expectations for academic achievement based on socioeconomic status, race, or what she called "miseducation." Students of color experience internalized racism through established structures that reward assimilation to dominant cultural norms and penalize authentic expressions of personal identity supported through cultural norms.

Continual research in internalized racism continues to be a focus topic as we question the impact on educational practices. Internal racism has a far-reaching effect. From experiences with racism, whether overt or covert, toward students of color in public schools, to recruitment initiatives for teachers of color into colleges of education, the impact of self-hatred or questioning of self-worth reflects the continual cycle of the belief that the dominant culture has more value (Huber, Johnson, and Kohli, 2006). Unfortunately, due to silenced dialogue, hostile, racist environments, and feelings of devalued intellectual contributions, teachers of color were in essence, "pushed out" of the profession.

Through a review of the literature about internalized racism, hostile, racist environments that teachers of color face in the educational profession, I reflected on Rita Kohli's (2018) research discussing the two areas she identified as Institutionalized marginalization for people of

color in education and individualized marginalization. In her research, Kohli (2018) asserted that there is a direct impact of “...relentless oppression” on individuals who work in schools where both forms of marginalization are supported (p. 16) Based on the findings, teachers of color facing these forms of racism reported feelings of isolation in their profession. They reported feelings of being invisible and devalued often overlooked for leadership positions where their skills and talents qualify rather than being only considered as cultural brokers.

In the study, the participants identified with the idea of being pushed out of the profession. According to Kohli (2018), the participants revealed experiences of alienation and marginalization that lead to self incrimination and decisions for exiting the profession. They further explained the burden of working in hostile environments leaving them to question the strength of their personal convictions through internalizing negativity as personal flaws. All too often, teachers of color faced these feelings of inadequacy in their professional practices as well as personal growth in the profession that stems from the perpetuating environment that belittles their contributions and marginalizes their expertise (Huber et al., 2006). With little support in safe places to explore and discuss racial inequities and social justice issues that permeated schools and school systems policies, teachers of color were pushed out of the profession. It bears noting that this conversation concerning internalized racism began under review by researchers over a decade yet remains as an integral explanation for feelings of teachers of color who are “pushed out” of the profession despite the concentrated recruitment efforts of recent times.

Kohli (2014) concluded that racism in educational practices had damaging effects on students of color. Internalized racism or rather hierarchal racism in curriculum, delivery of instruction, low expectations for nondominant cultures potentially, for Black teachers had a detrimental effect in reciprocating these same ideologies in their educational practices. By

identifying internalized racism within themselves, Black teachers provided a more culturally responsive and meaningful educational experience for students of color and dispelled the racial hierarchy that racism perpetuates. This hierarchy marginalized students of the nondominant race. Huber et al. (2006) argued that school structures have supported internalized racism among students of color. According to the authors students of color self perception was adversely affected when experiencing a teaching force that is predominantly white and are inexperienced in understanding the impact of culture in educational practices (Huber et al., 2006). In their research, they noted how racism is continually supported among teaching practices and institutions, instructional content, and lack of equitable resources within communities of color (Huber et al., 2006). Even though there were differences among Black teachers in experiences with racism, their practices added value to challenging inequitable practices in support of students of color.

**Challenges Black teachers face in their practice.** Challenges to teaching in urban, hard to staff schools have continued to be a concern in providing schooling to students of poverty in these areas. The efforts to create a more equitable educational experience for students in public schools, particularly students of color, faced many setbacks. Cultural experiences for Black teachers have been the embodiment of their educational practices. The enticement for entering the profession of education stemmed from the desire for social justice, support of the community, and drive for culturally responsive pedagogy. Within this framework laid the need to teach the whole child. However, Black teachers have found themselves in a quandary with the dominant culture method of delivery and instruction, an educational platform that alienated people of color. Schools do not reflect the student population accurately as more students of color were in urban, high-poverty areas. Recruitment of Black teachers, particularly in these areas, have been

an ongoing effort and has proven to be successful. However, retaining these teachers have been a challenge. According to Ahmad and Boser (2014) more Black teachers were training for careers in education than White teachers however they have not remained in the profession (p. 14).

Teaching assignments for novice teachers in urban, students of color schools have proven to be an underlining reason for leaving the profession at such high rates. Even though, according to Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton, & Freitas, (2010), a review of research reported a pattern of Black teachers choosing to work in high poverty, minority schools (p. 91). As noted, more recent research reflected dissatisfaction with these assignments that create an exodus from the profession at higher rates than their white peers.

As with the change in the educational organization after the “Brown” decision that, in essence, pushed them out schools, Black teachers experienced resistance to their practices. To gain insight into the challenges Black teachers faced beyond the sphere of pedagogy and content and the need for advocacy of culturally responsive instructional practices, Kohli and Pizarro (2016) quoted one of the participants in their study as saying he faced the challenge of staying true to his goal and focus on education that his colleagues did not share. This dilemma placed him at odds with coworkers and positioned him to continuously struggle between breaking ranks with pedagogical practices that support oppressive ideologies or reaffirm the status quo (p. 79). Kohli and Pizzaro (2016) further asserts that due to several factors that involve a “hostile racist climate” and using CRT as an analytical tool, Black teachers have been “pushed out” rather than choosing to leave the profession. In this research, the authors claimed that an exodus of Black teachers from the profession is due to the overwhelming obstacles and feelings of isolation they experience when attempting to teach. These examples included experiences of Black teachers overwhelmed in learning to teach while carrying the burden of responsibilities of being cultural

brokers in an environment of few Black colleagues (p. 16). However, Kohli and Pizzaro (2016) concluded they found that Black teachers, particularly with a strong desire for social justice and racial equity in education, were committed to working in urban schools with minority students. (p. 21). This dedication framed the continual press to remain with students in hard to staff, urban schools.

Kohli and Pizarro (2016) explained that Black teachers' experience many obstacles that challenge their goals in supporting culturally responsive curriculum or to advocate for their communities as the educational system continues to reflect the European, middle class, dominant culture and race values that lack sustainable support for diversity. Yet, in their research, they found that Black teachers readily accept teaching assignments in high poverty schools.

Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton, & Freitas, (2010) expressed concern with regard to historical patterns of unequal access to resources for high poverty schools and the potential of repetition of such practices; specifically when black teachers who chose to work in high poverty schools but must face working conditions that are detrimental to the academic success of students in these schools as well as a supportive working environment.

In further research, Achinstein and Ogawa (2012) through their study to gain an understanding for Black teachers who are in the profession for their commitment to help underprivileged students found that Black teachers are faced with a dilemma between the demands of the profession and their true desires to support students of color. Their goals, from their commitment to teaching and their university preparation programs, encouraged them to embrace the culturally responsive curriculum and methods of teaching. Because historically, low performing schools are predominantly minorities and underprivileged students, these Black teachers focused their purposes in teaching in these urban schools where they felt they can make

a difference. Achinstein and Ogawa (2012) further asserted that unfortunately, Black teachers faced obstacles within the building that exacerbated their desires clothed in accountability practices, pacing guides, mandates for improvement that are standardized and fail to identify with the diversity of cultures and learning for these students (p. 26). They used a case study approach, for five years of new Black teachers through their pre-service experience and their first years in the profession committed to teaching in urban school settings, with no gender or subject matter preference and participants from California, to gauge the in-depth understanding of Black teachers perspectives on classroom practices and their purpose for culturally responsive teaching. The authors concluded their analysis with a call for policymakers to address the impact of accountability measures that alienate Black teachers and the students they endeavor to reach through culturally responsive practices and curriculum (p. 31). They determined this contradiction to be “double bind”, phrase coined by George Bateson and offered interpretation from the study presented by Achinstein and Ogawa (2012). Therefore, supporting pedagogy that emphasizes community and social justice approaches to instructional practices was vital to retaining Black teachers.

**Addressing institutional barriers to equity.** A growing body of recent research point to other more concerning and yet policy amendable practices that account for teacher retention and attrition in high-poverty, urban schools. This research pointed to evidence that favorable working conditions contribute significantly to the desires of teachers to remain in urban schools (Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012; Ladd, 2011). Among these concerns, particularly for Black teachers, was the drive to support students’ academic endeavors that were limited in their own experiences through various formats that include the support of administration, policy, and curriculum resources (Borrero et al., 2010) Current research in educational practices, both qualitative and



quantitative, support the premise that high-poverty schools were better served by high-quality teachers especially under supportive working conditions. According to Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, (2012) to maintain a high quality, effective teaching force to support academic achievement for students in high poverty, minority school, policymakers must consider "... school context as teachers experience it" (p. 10).

However, the retention of teachers in the profession has been an ongoing concern for educators. Teacher turnover rates continued to grow, particularly within urban, hard to staff schools. There were various reasons for teachers leaving the field. According to the Center for American Progress, Black teachers chose to leave the teaching profession more often than White teachers (Ahmad & Boser, 2014). In their research, they outlined reasons commonly found in research such as challenging working conditions, poor respect for teaching abilities, skills, and knowledge as professionals, and low salary. These findings painted a picture of the immediate need for intervention and support to stop what they call America's leaky pipeline for Black teachers. From this research, the authors outlined a linear progression of setbacks for Black teachers beginning with the lack of academic opportunities from early elementary school to the obstacles for success in standardized tests in college entrance exams and program entrance exams. They further identified the financial aspect of success in educational opportunities for those who do successfully obtain higher education but seek other careers that pay more money to offset the debt incurred. In addressing their findings on why Black teachers leave the profession, the authors noted that these teachers cite working conditions as a reason for departure. Often, novice teachers' assignments are to underperforming schools where the working conditions consist of low pay, high discipline, and limited resources. In addition, Pabon (2016) researched the need for retention of Black teachers using the theoretical framework of life history. Based on

the findings, the author concurred that Black teachers are leaving the profession at high rates. This research also identified reasons for the exodus as a lack of respect for the profession or their professional skills and knowledge. The participants in the research reported that negative experiences caused them to question their career choices and determined that such working conditions were not productive to their career paths (p. 13).

Focusing on the institutional barriers that undermine retention, concern for high-quality educational programs that were rigorous and competitive continue to surface in the research. Students lack support in academic achievement when teacher turnover was great in urban, high poverty schools. These novice teachers were beginning their practice and were in need of support themselves in instructional delivery of content, management of the learning environment, and navigating the world of school from the teachers' perspective. As the concentration in recent years on recruitment strategies escalated, the retention of these teachers became a focus. According to research conducted by Ingersoll and May (2011), the teaching force in recent years have become more diverse. Based on their findings in the data, they noted that recruitment initiatives have been successful in getting more Black teachers into the field of education. However, the data also reflect that the retention of Black teachers has become an issue as they note that year to year the percentages of those leaving the profession outweigh the percentages of those recruited into the profession (p. 64). The data reflects that the issue of equitable distribution of the teaching staff to the students continue to be misaligned.

### **In Their Words Storytelling and Counter Storytelling**

There remains a pressing problem of teacher retention in public education and specifically Black teachers in urban schools. Research supports that Black teachers were committed to assignments in low performing urban schools and had higher retention rates than

their White peers (Achinstein et al., 2010). However, current research reflects more Black teachers leaving at faster rates than their White counterparts (Ahmad & Boser, 2014). Understanding the need to challenge the status quo continues to be a goal in understanding “why” Black teachers remain in teaching mainly in public urban schools. Through their pedagogy, their lived experiences as they perceive themselves as champions for social justice within the framework of culturally responsive teaching, Black teachers challenged the racist system that catches us in a double bind (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2012).

CRT offers a framework for researchers to continue to engage in discussions about teacher retention and the growing concerns with recruitment, countering the dominant cultural perspective of educational equity for the purpose of soliciting an understanding of the impact of institutional barriers of racism experienced by teachers of color. A number of research initiatives were focusing on Black teachers in their pedagogical practices, particularly with students of color (Borrero, Flores, & De la Cruz, 2016; Nuri-Robins, Lindsey, Lindsey, & Terrell, 2011). This research base had sought to gain insight into patterns for successful teaching strategies. A recurring theme among these teachers was the need for connectedness. They saw their role as connecting with their students with apparent reasons such as typical race and relating students to people of success within their race. They saw themselves as defenders of their race and protectors for their students against prejudices and inequalities.

Milner and Hoy (2003) found in their research focusing on the successes and struggles of a Black teacher (Dr. Wilson) a recurring theme of the need for connectedness and that of modeling for students the determination and pride in her race as well as combating negative stereotypes. These attributes had become part of Dr. Wilson’s definition of the teaching task and, thus, an element in her self-efficacy judgments. In her words, she recounted her reasons for

teaching in her specific school district. She stated that she wanted her students to see a Black female whose skin pigmentation identified her as a black person who was proud to be of the Black race. In her remarks, this participant felt her responsibility in her current teaching position was to dispel negative stereotypes regarding black people.

Black teachers stories offer another viewpoint in countering ideologies and misconceptions of Black students in teaching and learning. As noted by Solorzano and Yosso (2002), U. S. history told through the context of the privileged dominant culture revealed a one sided story whereas people of color stories are omitted or misconstrued (p. 36). Counter storytelling allowed for the silenced voices of nondominant groups to be heard. Through this tenet of CRT, challenges to status quo in revealing inequities in educational practices became cornerstones for addressing racism and its impact in academic achievement for all students. As marginalized people began to tell their viewpoints of the story, greater insight is possible to support academically low-achieving students and challenge low expectations for these students. The continual cycle of poverty, marginalization, and cultural dominance that clouds education became more evident through the stories of teachers whose experiences and perspectives differ from the dominant culture. The richness and cultural support of these experiences were needed to develop safe spaces for intuitiveness and resourcefulness in educating the whole child. However, historically, safe spaces for professional discourse in gaining understanding and insightfulness into teaching and learning through cultural responsiveness have not always been available or celebrated.

In fact, Delpit (1988) discovered in her research, the discontent felt by Black teachers in education conversations evolved into silenced dialogue. In reporting her findings, she reflected upon the frustrations of Black teachers. The findings revealed that Black teachers noted that they

stop talking because white people don't listen (p. 280). It was because of this silenced dialogue that the need for counter storytelling is essential to addressing the dominant middle-class European curriculum that marginalizes students of color. Milner and Hoy (2003) concluded from the words of their participant, Dr. Wilson, that we as educators share a common desire to make a difference in the lives of students through our teaching and that was the basis for why we are in the educational profession.

Through counter storytelling, Black teachers presented a different perspective than that of the dominant culture. The research literature on the retention of teachers focused on issues of external or extrinsic motivators. Black teachers experiences revealed a challenge to the current, predominant research with regard to inequitable teaching assignments, curriculum, and resources where diversity, with respect for cultural nuances, are often lacking. Delpit's (1988) research revealed from the perspective of a participant a challenge to the idea of colorblindness as a failure to see students as they are, their unique abilities they bring to learning. The challenge to this notion revealed the impact of counter storytelling to the dominant cultural values embedded in the educational system. Told from the perspective of those who have experienced alienation and marginalization, the narrative changed. The idea of colorblindness, as stated by this participant, created a sense of inadequacy in students of color. It perpetuated the idea of cultural dominance rather than cultural respect. According to Matias (2016), the idea of teaching preservice teachers to be blind to color led them to be blind to race and race-related issues that undergird low expectations and low achievement in students of color. Teachers who do not see color ultimately denied the existence of diversity rather than celebrating the richness of differences in culture. This blindness caused tunneled perceptions for the dominant culture in educational policies and contributed to the lack of success for students of color in poverty in

public urban schools. Matias (2016) further stated that through their continual access to students daily, teachers have the responsibility for shaping and growing children's identity. What message was taught to students of color when attempting to be blind to color, race, identity, cultural nuances that make up their existence. Teacher preparation programs should engage preservice teachers in addressing race and its impact on educating students in high-poverty, students of color urban schools. This call from the voices of Black teachers spelled out explicitly the misconceived conceptions of dominant cultural ideologies that are detrimental to the development of equity in education. The wealth of counter storytelling found in the voices of experience, the voices of exasperation, and the voices of excitement as educators drawn from Black teachers supported their desire to remain with their students. The use of counter storytelling was essential to gaining insight into the reasons for the retention of Black teachers in urban, hard to staff schools. Only through their stories and with their own words, researchers identify themes and motifs that direct the discourse in educating Black students, respect for culturally diverse curriculum, and the understanding that everyone has a story to tell that will enrich our world rather than separate groups within this society.

### **Chapter III: Methods**

I chose to utilize a narrative inquiry approach in qualitative research for this study to provide a personalized response to the research questions. In it, I sought to listen to and learn from Black teachers who defied the statistics and remain in the profession, specifically in urban schools. Through individual interviews, this research reflects the story of teachers, their lived experiences, and their insights into their attempts to educate the whole child. Guided through the lens of CRT and precisely the tenets of race matters; storytelling and counter storytelling, this qualitative narrative inquiry study told their stories, in their own words, of why Black teachers remain at public, urban, hard to staff schools in Southeast Alabama, specifically within a city school district. Furthermore, this study should help guide a focus for further studies on retention strategies that support sustaining high- quality educators, particularly Black teachers, in challenging schools.

This chapter was organized to explain the process for gathering and analyzing data in support of the research questions. I considered the procedures for the research sample population, the tools to support the data collection and analysis, and support for the use of narrative inquiry in the method of research for this study. The necessity for ethical considerations and trustworthiness of the findings was of utmost importance and therefore, closely monitored. An explanation of the limitations and delimitations is presented to identify and discuss potential weaknesses and the limitations of the research to reach a select population within a section of the United States, precisely one state and one area of that state.

#### **Qualitative Design**

The context of experience was a major element of the narrative inquiry; the task was to identify the conditions under which a certain relationship or condition or response holds. The

editors of *Critical Race Theory in Education: All God's Children Got a Song* (2006) declared that critical race theorist challenge the story of white dominance in American education. The theme taken from the song “All God’s Children Got a Song,” presented the backdrop for narrative inquiry. I determined that hearing the stories of Black teachers in their own words and inquiring into their lived experiences is a critical component in understanding the importance for Black teachers to remain in urban schools with students of color. Their individual experiences as Black teachers were at least partly the product of individual interpretation. Based on these individual stories emerges the story of their lived experiences, the untold or unrevealed nuances or reflections of a broader experience by each individual collectively. Therefore, qualitative research, specifically the use of narrative inquiry, was necessary to hear their truths.

**What did Black teachers have to say about remaining in urban schools.** They stayed for various reasons such as social justice and the need for community, shared experiences, hope for the future. This research focused on Black teachers. The question of why stay to teach in urban schools with predominantly students of color was the inquiry.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Why use a narrative inquiry approach? Mary Kaye Kramp (2004) explained that narrative inquiry allows for entry into the personal lived experiences of the owners of the stories. Through this approach, I am able to hear of participants’ lived experiences in the context of their story. As each individual reflects on their experiences as a Black teacher in urban schools, a story evolves and is retold to pinpoint the underlying truths found in the collective story and its impact in the educational organization. I chose a narrative inquiry to address the one overarching question of why Black teachers remain in urban schools. My goal was to hear the lived experiences of Black teachers in urban schools. Utilizing interviews as the source of data, I



listened to the experiences of these teachers, their insights, and their aspirations. I situated the inquiry in the theoretical framework, CRT, supporting the impact of matters related to race, I sought to understand whether the collective experiences of the participants reflect one common story or if these experiences are unique to each individual.

In support of the use of a narrative inquiry for this research, I looked to Connelly and Clandinin (1990) as they reported the meaning of school situations are found in the narratives of life. I struggled with what I erroneously thought was a need to separate the research from myself and my own experiences, my passion, and my desires as a Black teacher. I have found myself increasingly in a struggle for identity within the realm of the educational system, challenging passionately, my desires to address the barriers I felt, feel, and face as I attempt to educate the whole child in a predominantly Black, public urban elementary school. I discovered that there is no dissection of my truths from the person that I am. This revelation propelled me to research the lived experiences of Black teachers and hear their stories as to why they remain in urban schools. I believe that experiences define a person, determine purpose and aspirations in support of personal goals. This narrative approach allowed me to listen to experiences of Black teachers as they reflected on why they remained in the profession in public urban schools. Only through their words do we attempt to hear their stories and perhaps arrive at an idea as to why they remain with students of color students.

### **Research Questions**

Through the lens of Critical Race Theory, my research sought to identify how race matters to Black teachers in public urban schools. I chose to seek out Black teachers' stories to determine whether their stories were reflective of the challenges of teaching in public urban schools by all teachers or was their story unique to Black teachers. With the guiding tenets of

race matters, storytelling, and counter storytelling, this research further investigated these questions:

- How do Black teachers see themselves in the role of education?
- What specific practices told through their stories support them in remaining in urban schools?
- How do organizational contexts show up in the stories of Black teachers choosing to remain in high-poverty, urban schools?

### **Research Participants**

Using purposive sampling, the subject of the design was Black teachers in public, urban schools. The demographic population was similar in each school regarding the socioeconomic status. Teachers gained entry into this data collection by volunteering. Of the volunteers to participate, all were Black women with more than 5 years of experience in teaching. The age range of the participants was from early '30s to late '50s. Each of the participants live in the communities they serve.

**Recruitment and Criteria.** Participants were invited to participate in my research study if they identified as Black teachers with more than five years of teaching experience in public, predominately Black schools. Contact was made with each participant by me through telephone and email. Each participant responded to my contact agreeing to participate. Some of the participants recruited other participants through word of mouth to volunteer. The number of participants who responded and voluntarily agreed to the interview was seven.

**Consent.** Participants were provided with copies of the consent agreement document. Research permission was granted and guided through the Auburn University Institutional Research Board before seeking cooperation and collecting data. I utilized an interview protocol

approved by Auburn University IRB. This protocol began with an introduction of the researcher, a background of the research, and the purpose for requesting participation. I included the purpose of the study, the intended outcome and use of the data collection. Participants were assured of anonymity of their responses and clearly defined request as participants as volunteers in the research. They were informed that they may leave the study at any time. Member checks for validity and reliability were offered to each participant by way of copies of the transcribed interviews and collaboration with me. Per the IRB protocol, participants were Black teachers currently in the field of education who have been teaching five years or more in high-poverty urban schools within the school district(s) in southeastern Alabama.

### **Data Collection**

Storytelling, in participants' own words, lend itself to descriptive details of their reasons for continuing in the profession, particularly in urban schools. Narrative stories used as data investigates the lived experience of individuals or groups to reflect their worldview. It offers the opportunity to enter into the lived experiences of individuals as they experience their world. Utilizing narrative inquiry as the method for qualitative research, specifically for the purpose of gaining alternate viewpoint to the dominant culture's point of view identified by critical race theorists as counterstorytelling, was the best approach to gain insight into teachers' lived experiences as they experience their stories.

Although the anticipated number of volunteers to this study was more than ten, the actual number of interviews was seven. These interviews were conducted by me during scheduled meetings after school hours and on weekends as schedules allowed. The interviews were designed to be open-ended to allow participants to speak freely and openly about their experiences. During these interviews, I recorded, only one participant chose not to be recorded,

and took notes documenting specific responses to interview questions, observing body language as an unspoken reaction to experiences, and reviewing standard terms or language cues to assist with interpretation of nuances expressed by teachers. The interview protocol questions were based in research and personal experiences.

After each interview, I reviewed the notes, highlighting recurring responses. Transcribing of the recorded data was done by me. This method allowed a more “hands-on” approach with the data to discover any possible themes. The purpose of member checks in qualitative research is to add support for the validity and reliability of the data used in the research. Each participant was provided opportunity to review the interview protocol as I reviewed their responses at the close of the interview. Members were asked for clarification of their responses. Providing participants the opportunity to review transcriptions support the accuracy of their responses. After transcribing the interview, each member was given the opportunity to review the transcriptions. Members stated they were in agreement with what was said at the interview.

### **Data Analysis**

In a narrative approach, the researcher uses a selected source i.e. interviews to delve deeply into the experiences of the participants to reveal the details of that experience in an effort to find emerging patterns or themes relevant to the collective experiences. In order to address the richness of this narrative inquiry, I centered my analysis for this narrative research study in Webster and Mertova (2007) methodology for narrative research framework. This framework serves as a guide to delving into the process of a narrative inquiry. Recognizing in this narrative inquiry analysis two overarching themes developed by Webster and Mertova (2007), human centeredness and the complexity of human experience, I looked to the data to guide me in determining the flow of analysis. The authors identified in their framework what they called

constituent parts with sub constituents sections. The first of the constituents is processes with three sub-constituents identified as tools, criteria, and structure and are reflected in the flow of this description of the analysis.

**Tools.** This section recognizes the instruments used in collecting and analyzing the data (Webster & Mertova, 2007). I used a priori coding to guide me with a structured interview protocol and remained open to possible themes discovered in the data (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Gilgun, 2013; Shenton, 2004). The codes helped me to organize the interview protocol and guided my expectations of finding similar responses in the data. Table 1 reflects the emergent codes and themes developed from the participants’ responses to the interview questions.

**Criteria.** This section provides the methods used to ensure the accuracy and truthfulness in reporting of the data (Webster & Mertova, 2007). As I reviewed the data (manually coded) through open coding, I identified 16 emergent codes. Throughout this process, I continued to log in my reflections, noting participants' reactions to the questions, responses to the prompting, and general body language responses. The following table provides a visual representation of the processes I used in analyzing the data.

Table 1

*Data Analysis Process: Codes and Themes*

<b>Emergent Codes</b>		
<b>Research Question 1</b>	<b>Research Question 2</b>	<b>Research Question 3</b>
Perception of education as a “calling”	Make connections to content and the world around them	Tenacity to overcome obstacles
Identify with students- serve as role models	Struggles with education	Optimistic for change in support of equity

Management of behaviors	Drive to provide better experiences for students	Supportive environment-mentoring
Uniqueness of their perspectives	Build relationships-Connectedness	Dedication to students
Connected by race, culture, shared experiences		Build relationships-Connectedness
Build relationships-Connectedness		Challenge misconceptions/judgmental attitudes
Depth of commitment		
Support of community – legacy		
	<b>Themes</b>	
<b>Research Question 1</b>	<b>Research Question 2</b>	<b>Research Question 3</b>
Teacher as Disciplinarian	Organization and building relationships as a key practice	Social Alienation and marginalization
Advocacy/ Self Identify	Ability to make instruction relevant to cultural nuances	Stereotype Threats
Destiny by design		

I gathered the transcribed data from the interviews and the notes taken from the one participant who chose not to be audio recorded. My focus was on individual participant’s stories to reveal the single story, if there was one discovered through their lived experiences. I read over the transcriptions, combing through the data to identify codes. I chose to report participants’ comments and responses to the interview questions that stood out as significant (meaning those responses that were similarly reported by the participants). I included comments from participants that fell in the minority responses (fewer than two), noting that participants’ revelation was important to the overall understanding of factors that influenced retention in education but not necessarily retention within their current position.

I then assigned codes as shown in Table 1. I used index cards to record these codes and posted them to the wall under each of the research questions. As I examined comments by the participants, I positioned them under the corresponding code reflective of the statements. The

codes derived directly from the participants' responses were noted by the use of parenthesis. I noted that some of the codes had more participant responses than others. At this point, I determined that these codes were significant because they aligned to the research questions. The significant responses identified by codes was then grouped into overarching themes. I looked closely at the codes to see common threads in developing themes in response to the research questions. Data (responses from the participants as they were reflected under the codes) was then synthesized to determine possibilities of emerging themes. Through multiple efforts of reorganizing and reposting, I settled on seven themes. These themes closely align to the collective story of the participants and the research questions. They were used to focus and organize the findings in Chapter 4 within the context of the research questions. I then reflected on the findings under each of themes to describe the emerging collective story as represented by the data.

To support my desire to remain openminded in analyzing the data and reporting the collective story, I found that a peer debriefer was necessary. The use of a peer debriefer allowed me the needed examination and review of my analysis of the data and for clarification of procedures and processes as well as the possibility of an alternate viewpoint. I felt that soliciting the support of another viewpoint was crucial to examining the data to accurately reflect the collective story of the lived experiences of the participants. The peer debriefer, who identifies as a white woman, also serves as a trusted colleague and critical friend. Therefore, her perspectives were invaluable to me. We met and reviewed my codes reflected by the data. She made suggestions for grouping of data under common themes. Through the first review of the data, I identified broad codes. With the assistance of the peer debriefer, I was able to clarify the codes and group them under more specific themes. At the conclusion of our meeting, she agreed with

my evolution of the seven themes from the data. She noted that these themes resonated particularly with her as a woman in an interracial marriage and as a teacher with more than 5 years of experience in predominately Black population city schools. Allowing peer debriefing supported the coding processes and help develop concise descriptions of evolving themes. The use of an auditor was not necessary as peer debriefing served as an outside source for the reliability of the research. All research data followed the protocol set forth by the Auburn University Institutional Review Board guidelines. The final report reflected a narrative story as to why Black teachers remain in high-poverty, challenging schools.

**Structure.** This section provides a description of the story of the narrative in data collection and analysis (Mertova & Webster, 2007). As I reflected on the responses from the participants, my focus was on individual participant's stories to reveal the single story, if there was one, discovered through their lived experiences. Individual participants and I met at various times, primarily after school hours and on the weekends and in various places such as the public library, classroom, or my home. Meeting in the public library proved to be a challenge but did provide a mutual environment where the participant could speak freely of her experiences. We found that meeting in the classroom also was a challenge but was much appreciated by the participant in that she had her resources available for review as she discussed her approaches to teaching and advocacy for her students. Meetings on the weekends and after school in private offices proved to be successful in that the environment was conducive to both the participant and the researcher to speak freely describing and discussing lived experiences. In these meetings, the participants and I interacted comfortably throughout the interviews and were able to develop a rapport. My goal was to help the participants feel as comfortable as possible so that they could reflect deeply on their experiences and tell their story. We spoke freely of our shared experiences



and through probing questions, the participants offered details of their lived experiences. At the conclusion of these meetings, I reminded the participants of the details of the consent agreement reminding them of my commitment to protect their identity. We parted with these assurances. As quickly as it was possible for me to review the contents of the interviews, I made notes of my reflections in the audit trail.

### **Dependability and Trustworthiness**

There have been many arguments for and against the dependability (ability to rely on the truth of the data) of research using qualitative methods. In some qualitative research, the researcher attempts to understand a particular experience or event as it relates to the participant or observer. In this research, the question arose as to whether this story (Black teachers desire to remain in predominantly Black city schools) was one of many stories told or is one story told by many. Careful consideration was taken to protect the dependability of the research findings and to justify the truth of this research. Shenton (2004) explained that verification of viewpoints and experiences add transparency based on several data points (p. 66). To support the trustworthiness of the data and the findings of the research proposal, Gilgun (2013) described the process of examining notes and transcripts from multiple points of view to provide a well rounded approach to the concept. Through my use of a peer debriefer who identified as a white woman with more than 10 years of experience in teaching in predominately Black, urban schools, I was able to look closely at the data from another viewpoint. Similar experiences of the peer debriefer with the interview participants identified the possibility of intersectionality for the peer debriefer. Her perspective in reviewing the data offered another point of view that I found to be similar to those of the participants but her viewpoint was from being white and not having experienced marginalization and alienation as described the participants.

## **Ethics**

As with all research proposals, the goal of the researcher in protecting the participants was that of no harm. The heart of research is the respect of the participants' involvement as well as the dependability and reliability of the data under review. As a researcher, careful and methodical approaches to protecting the process is crucial to the trustworthiness of the findings (Yin, 2016). In qualitative research, many choices are made by the researcher specifically in drawing out the essential factors of the study from participants' responses as well as being open-minded and discovering contradictory findings, alternative viewpoints, and unintended revelations. Presentation of these findings and conclusions yields an additional area where the researchers' personal ethical code is drawn upon to ensure that the work is authentic, particularly in an effort for transparency (Webster, & Mertova, 2007; Yin, 2016).

With prior consent through the Auburn University Institutional Review Board (IRB), this research proposal attempted to hear the stories of the lived experiences of Black teachers in predominately Black, urban schools. It was my intent and sincere desire that through this research process via informed consent forms and verbal reiterations at each meeting and discussion session, the participants were assured and reassured of the protection of their responses with the utmost confidence by use of nonidentifying markers; their participation was entirely voluntary and could withdraw any time during the research project as long as their data was identifiable. Participants were granted peer checks of transcribed notes to approve or disapprove or clarify content.

## **Significance and Limitations**

Conducting a qualitative study for this research question opened opportunities for further discussions on the role of Black teachers in the educational system. This study was vital to the

larger body of research because it has created dialogue and a focus for retention by addressing concerns and issues with being a Black teacher within a predominately White, middle class educational system. With reference to the peer debriefer who identifies as white, other white teachers may also have unique experiences with teaching students of color in urban schools. Landsman (2009) discussed in her work the need for white teachers to address what it means to be “white” and the impact of racist viewpoints on the students for whom they teach. In addition, Vinnik ( 2015) utilized Landsman research in focusing on the need for white teachers to be trained to be more effective in teaching students of color. However, this study did not address teachers of color other than those who identify as Black but does recognize that other teachers of color may hold similar views and have a story to tell of their experiences as well.

## Chapter IV: Findings

After gathering the data and reflecting on the participants' responses, I organized the findings as reflected in this chapter. It contains the results of the narrative research study to investigate the lived experiences of Black teachers in urban schools who remain in the profession after the 3-5-year exodus. It is organized by the research questions and the participants' responses. It further outlines how each of the responses presented revealed the recurring themes/codes in relation to their stories. As noted in the previous chapters, the participants' responses to the interview questions guided by the research inquiry questions evolved into themes that are developed here. The conclusions to these findings are presented in the following chapter with recommendations for future studies.

I situated my research questions in the categories commonly assigned to the framework of Critical Race Theory (CRT). With the guiding tenets of race matters, storytelling, and counter storytelling, my research further investigated these questions:

- How do Black teachers see themselves in the role of education?
- What specific practices told through their stories support them in remaining in urban schools?
- How do organizational contexts show up in the stories of Black teachers choosing to remain in high-poverty, urban schools?

In this research, I sought to hear from Black teachers, specifically those who desired to remain in predominantly Black population city schools, to ascertain whether their experiences was one of many stories told or is there one story; one experience told by many participants. I utilized Critical Race Theory as the theoretical framework to guide my exploration in explaining how race does matter. Through this exploration, I discovered that the stories told by each of us,

is one story with varying experiences but similar conclusions. As I delved more deeply into my own experiences as a Black teacher, I realized that the matter of race is an ingrained part of who I am and how I perceive myself as a Black teacher. In order to anchor my discoveries, I found that my roots are embedded in the historical interactions of matters of race in the educational system. These interactions propelled me to the cause and reason for remaining with my students.

Because race matters is a factor in retention in predominantly Black populated urban schools, challenging stereotypes and championing social justice become foundations for the work in educating students. Historically, peoples of color have been denied educational opportunities. From times of slavery through reconstruction and into the 20th century, education for black people was a violation of the law and later was limited through legislation that created and supported segregation i.e. Plessy v. Ferguson (Ferguson, 1896), Jim Crow laws. The results of segregation policies created inequity in education for Black students (Bell,1980). Through legal challenges to segregation in education, students of color were shown to have been denied access to equitable education. As school systems were slow to integrate, racist practices became embedded in institutions (Russo, Harris, & Sandidge, 1994). These practices have evolved into institutional barriers to the success of students of color in predominantly white, middle class educational systems.

As a Black teacher having experience in teaching in urban public schools, I recognize that my experiences have framed my world view. I have served my entire career in schools comprised of the majority population is students of color. I became interested in studying the experiences of Black teachers to determine if my experiences and their experiences were directly related and if my decision to remain based on these experiences also supported other teachers' decisions to remain. Specifically I wanted to know if our stories were the same story, regardless

of the location of the urban school we chose to serve. I bring to this study more than twenty years of experience in the field of education. More recently in the role as principal and central office administrator, I bring to this study an overwhelming desire to challenge the status quo in the policies and procedures, i.e institutionalized barriers that fail students of color. In addition, I bring my determination to understand cultural barriers that perpetuate poor academic performance for students of color. Through this project, my vision for equitable access to education has been strengthened as I review the scope of the problem and join the voices of educators, past and present, who champion social justice and challenge racist practices in the field of education. Because my experiences are so deeply rooted in my background, my upbringing, and my personal beliefs in teaching and learning, I have found that my objectivity in this project is often overshadowed by my personal experiences with racism.

Through coursework in qualitative study, I have learned as an educator in social sciences that continual research in this methodology approach supports a more diverse understanding to our world view. Through the lens of narrative inquiry, I am afforded the opportunity to hear and listen to stories that can help shape future endeavors, understand past experiences with clarity and purpose, and drive present decisions that will impact society. Participating in personal interviews with participants in the study allowed me to share common frustrations, desires, and realize that collectively we can make a difference in support of teaching and learning for all. My experiences in the process of data collection and procedures for reporting the findings helped to focus the information through synthesis allowing for clear and concise results. I chose to study this topic because it is personal. I wanted to tell my story of why I remained in the profession and to see if other teachers shared my experience and conclusions. As a social science educator, the theoretical framework of Critical Race Theory

resonated with me. Through this lens, I challenge the framework of the educational system that continue to reveal that it falls short of educating students of color.

## Participants

I chose to study the lived experiences of Black teachers with more than five years of experience in teaching in predominately Black city schools. Therefore the subject of the design was solicited through purposive sampling. There were seven participants for this study. Most of the participants were experienced teachers with more than ten years. Only one participant had less than ten years' experience in teaching. The ages of participants range from the early '30s to the late '50s. Each of the participants lives in the communities they serve, participate in local church assemblies, and have extended families in the same neighborhoods as the students they serve. The following chart shows the general makeup of the participants as identified by minimum requirements sought, as described in Chapter Three.

Table 2

*Data Summary: Teachers of Color – Demographics of Participants*

	<b>Years of experience</b>	<b>School Experiences</b>	<b>Highest degree earned</b>	<b>Age ranges</b>
<b>Ann</b>	13	Public	Masters	Early 30's
<b>Barbara</b>	13	Public/Private	Masters	Late 30's
<b>Clarise</b>	18	Public	Masters	Late 40's
<b>Denise</b>	13	Public/Private	Masters	Late 30's
<b>Essie</b>	18	Public	Masters	Late 30's
<b>Freda</b>	9	Public	Bachelors	Early 30's
<b>Gwen</b>	16	Public	Education Specialist	Late 50's

I analyzed the transcript data from seven interviews with teachers who identify as Black and have taught in urban, high poverty schools for more than five years. The evidence of quality for this study is in the data through member checks and peer debriefing.

The method of soliciting interviews via Facebook posting describing the study, the intent of the process, and a request for participants proposed a challenge. The responses were very minimal directly from the posting. However, each person who did respond suggested another person who would be interested in participating. This led to additional interviews. The interviews were scheduled at times and in places convenient for the participant (i.e., teacher's classroom, the public library, my home). All but one of the interviews were audio-recorded and all followed the interview protocol (Appendix A). Clarifying questions helped to drill down to reveal possible unexplored explanations in the discussion, understanding the interviewees' statements, and helping to relax the interviewee. All participants (identified by pseudonyms) seemed very comfortable with the topic, the discussions, and were willing to share their experiences. Interviews were transcribed by me using the recordings and playback to type the responses into a Microsoft Word document. This resource allowed me to transcribe the interview with minimal difficulty. The challenge was time and details as I transcribed each interview - which was approximately 1 hour each. I recorded my responses to the interviews in a reflective audit trail. This reflective document also helped me to analyze my thoughts, review interviewees' comments and challenge my own experiences with the interviewees' perspectives as well as the research.

### **Review of the data**

In reflecting on the data, I chose to support the research approach in a narrative study because it aligned with my processes in gathering the stories of participants, unveiling through these experiences the depth of their story, and retelling these stories to reflect the broader research in question as to why Black teachers remain in urban schools. In this search, I wanted to determine if these individual stories were one collective story. In discovering the details of



the participants' lived experiences, a more focused story was revealed that reflect the shared experiences of Black teachers in urban schools, their impact in the educational system, and their insightfulness of how race matters influence educational decisions.

From the responses of the seven participants, four of them reported that leaving the classroom to pursue other opportunities in the field of education was part of their current next steps in their career paths. Two participants stated their reasons for actively seeking to transition from the classroom was to pursue advancement in education-related fields (i.e., counseling, opening a private daycare business). In our conversations, they expressed that their desires to leave the classroom was grounded in their experiences over the course of their years as teachers. They noted that they were actively seeking to transition from the classroom to serve in another role in the educational field. In fact, one participant had worked toward this goal by completing academic coursework toward an advanced degree and was actively seeking employment. In our conversation, she expressed her desire to work with students in the capacity of rehabilitation therapy. She noted that her years of experience working in high poverty schools have allowed her to gain valuable skills that she believes, coupled with her education in rehabilitative counseling services, is a natural progression in advancement in the educational field and a logical next step for her. She expressed that her pending graduation from the university program in the Fall of this year would open doors for her in this new field and that she was actively looking to make the career move upon graduation. Another participant stated her desire to enter private practice as a daycare owner was to provide children the opportunity for early intervention. She stated that this goal has been a lifelong dream for her and would serve her well with her background experiences in education. She did not state a specific timeframe for her transition from the public school classroom to a private daycare owner/teacher but was in the process of

planning with family and friends in developing her business model. Neither participant shared whether they were offered or had accepted another position at this time.

Two participants did state that they would take a break from teaching and was actively looking into other options at this point in their career. Break was defined as leaving the classroom as a teacher but keeping the possibility of returning at some future date. The reasons given for a break were burnout in teaching due to the challenges with educational mandates; a scripted curriculum that deprives them of the real work of teaching; struggles with marginalization; and more demands on teachers but little financial compensation for the additional demands. These concerns, if adequately and effectively addressed and supported by policies governing education, form the basis in supporting retention. While expressing these concerns with what they stated as a continuous negative trend in education, these teachers were equally adamant in their support for the need for education and the need for someone to teach students. As Essie stated,

*I think as a teacher a lot of times that comes across your mind of taking a break. You continue to push through. And what keeps you continuing to push through is the children. You see where you are needed or where they need you. So that does come across your mind, then once you get through that day, you know you want to take that break; it always brings you back to wanting to stay.*

Essie further stated that she did plan to change direction from classroom teacher to opportunities to use her skills and advanced degree at the collegiate level in sports medicine.

The following sections are offered through the headings of the research questions to assist with aligning the findings to the overarching question of why Black teachers remain in urban schools.

## **How do Black teachers see themselves in the role of education?**

In this research, I sought to understand the viewpoint of Black teachers as to what they perceived was their value as an educator in predominately Black urban schools. From the participants' responses to interview questions, I noted the following themes as a disciplinarian, advocate for students of color, uniquely able to identify with students of color, shared experiences with students of color, and love, passion, and ministry (i.e., calling) to teach.

**Teacher as Disciplinarian.** The participants cited times from their experiences that being a disciplinarian is a big part of why they are successful and will continue to remain in the profession. Clarise identified this trait as one that brought her to the profession and has made her successful in practice as noted

*...And Principal J was the type of Principal that he was old school in a way. He came up under Mr. S., and when he came down the hallway, you better be teaching. You had to be in control of your classroom.*

She further concluded that when confronted by her principal in her third year of teaching to “*get control of her classroom*” if she wanted to return to the classroom, she needed to make changes. Clarise celebrated her success by recognition from her principal having improved in classroom management by stating, “*Mr. J says I never wrote a referral, he never had to come down to my room. I was hitting on all cylinders.*” She was excited that she had reached the goal her principal had set for her in managing her classroom and teaching her students. Control of the classroom was celebrated as ability to guide her students through the learning process without disruptions from student negative behavior and administrative intervention and is evidence of respect both for the teacher as well as for the educational process.

Each of the participants explained their role as a disciplinarian as one of having connectedness through building relationships with the students.

*It was the same, really the same, as far as like you know the discipline problems and things like that. You know you can see the similarities. You know, as a student growing up in...urban downtown...inner-city lifestyle like I'm a product of...So the behaviors are not new to me" (Barbara).*

*There's a clear difference when I can come in and tell a child the same thing that you have said ten times, but the first time, I say it, they do it. It's not because they respect me so much more than you or they like me so much more than you; I build that relationship, so they know that I care (Ann).*

*Relationships are key...Not only relationships with parents but with your coworkers, your colleagues, and also the most important relationships with your students. So building that relationship from day one is very important to your success for the first year. (Denise)*

Denise also describes an encounter with her students noting that the student sought her out when he experienced conflict with his teacher who was White. She related how she was able to help the student to see the importance of getting along with the teacher and following her expectations because as she stated,

*... When you get into your job field, there's gonna be people that you don't like but you will have to work with. I was like so we gonna start now. .... Cause you know, I run a tight ship in my classroom and the relationships I have with my students; they're everlasting.*

**Teacher advocacy/self identify.** Participants tended to see themselves as advocates for their students. Each participant stated that they desire to develop relationships with students and

parents allowed them to interact as well as intercept injustices or inequalities in the educational system. As an advocate, participants noted that their own experiences, both negative and positive, were reasons for remaining with students of color. The desire to intercept the challenges they faced and provide a better future for their students was paramount in their decisions to remain with their students. As Clarise stated,

*I believe that they see a teacher of color went through what they went through. For example, I just put this out there for my kids {so}they can relate to me... You can be better than me – go the next level.*

Barbara contributed success with students of color by referencing personal experiences that relate to physical appearances. Through interactions with the genre that uniquely identify Black culture, this participant saw this aspect of relationship building and advocacy on a deeper level than other teachers who did not understand students of color culture. She referenced

*...different ...hair styles with females ... {and} males... so I honestly say I'm less judgmental because you know that's like when we're growing up, that was just something to do.*

She further asserted that personally identifying with students of color provides a different perspective to student behavior such as

*The way we dress ...the urban look, the hip hop culture, the trendsetting... fashion trends here and there...lyrics of a song...You know honestly if a kid is mumbling the lyrics down the hall, but they are talking out loud, I might know the song...I can connect.*

Essie advocated for the need of mentors for students, particularly those reared in single-parent homes. She explained that she could identify with the children and their parents as she

too was a single parent. This identity helped her to understand her students and advocate for mentors who would support students to become successful in life.

**Destiny by design.** Four participants responded positively to the value of teachers of color as role models for students of color. They noted the need for students of color to see Black people's contributions carried value dispelling the notion that the only contributions of Black people were at the level of support staff but not in administrative positions.

*...in schools the lunchroom ladies are black, the janitors are black, the secretaries may be black...so when I say value, we hold value more than picking up a broom, mopping, sweeping, or fixing 600 meals for kids at a school" (Ann).*

Participants further emphasized they took pleasure in being of value to their students as a role model. All of the participants noted that their uniqueness as a teacher of color who overcame some of life's obstacles that their students may face was a clear indication of their belief of destiny to serve as a positive role model. Denise recalled a conversation with colleagues concerning the value of teachers of color. Her response was enlightening as she stated

*...I felt that I was just meeting the quota. So if I were told that I was there because I'm black, then I would tell them, well you know, I would do the best that I can. And use that for my advantage. Okay, I'm Black, so I'm going to make sure that I adjust to the cultures that Black kids and everyone else that's involved. And then I might introduce them to some culture that I have, or you know to tell them ways that they can be a positive product of their environment where they live at. They have to know that they can be whatever they put their minds to.*

**What specific practices are revealed through their stories that support them in remaining in urban schools?**

In the second question of this research, I refer to CRT in addressing White privilege and property rights of the dominant culture. I draw upon Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006) research arguing that the need to address race and the impact in educational reform through uncovering and analyzing cultural significance is paramount. Students of color are subjected to low expectations for academic achievement by various factors to include socioeconomic status and geographic locations (Achinstein, B., Ogawa, R. T., Sexton, D., & Freitas, C.,2010). As evidenced by these teachers' experiences, poor academic performance for students of color are undergirded by teacher perceptions, poor pedagogical practices, and general lack of meaningful resources to address individualized educational needs in closing achievement gaps. With reference to the research question regarding specific practices, the participants stated organization as a critical practice, ability to make instruction relevant to cultural nuances, and determination to build within students' capacity to learn through various instructional strategies.

**Organization and building relationships as a key practice.** With reference to being organized, success for these teachers was identified as having planned for the students and being ready to teach at all moments. This effort on behalf of the teacher was seen as evidence of their desire to build relationships to show that they cared for their students. Even though two out of the seven participants expressed here that the key to successfully managing the classroom, both academically and behaviorally, was organization, all seven of the participants in answering each of the research questions attributed these skills to their success as teachers. Denise expressed her excitement in having the freedom brought about due to her current school systems' transitioning and restructuring so that schools were more diverse; she was able to

*...break free from just having the resource to follow and figuring it out myself has been a difficult task...But once I figured out that I can do this and I'm not restricted...my classroom environment and dynamic has improved drastically this year.*

Barbara also noted that

*...patience, organization, and being prepared...That's gonna determine your day...you have to be ready, like ready to go.*

A continual theme expressed by all of the participants referenced the need to build relationships with students. Their collective response to defining build relationships was to do background research on the students you serve, their environment, their interests, show that you care for them as Ann stated:

*"They kinda feel like the forgotten about kids."*

They further clarified building relationships as making extra effort to be involved in their community (i.e. attending sports activities, making first calls home as a "get to know you" or "happy to be your child's teacher this year") as defined by Freda

*Get to know the students beyond what can be seen from standardized tests and on paper.*

**Ability to make instruction relevant to cultural nuances.** One of the strategies that were employed by most of the participants was to use content that was relevant to students of color to their world experiences to explain concepts. They noted that when they utilized the language of their culture (i.e., rappers' jargon, song lyrics) students were more "...in tune..." (Ann) with the learning. They were adamant about making that connection due to their own experiences, their immersion in the culture that made the learning real, authentic because they too understand the unspoken nuances of culture.



The participants stated that belief in their students' abilities was essential in developing curriculum and building capacity for learning for students. For example, Barbara described in detail an episode where she succeeded when she thought she might fail. She noted that her colleague's reaction when told the rigorous expectations of students, mostly Black, at-risk students would conduct impromptu writing essays following a prescribed rubric. Barbara explained that when the school and district administrators delivered this expectation,

*...teachers they just – you know faces were red, heads down- they were already defeated because they felt like the kid – well they can't even read, what do you mean you want them to write.*

In addition, she described the expectations and the response by colleagues as

*And they're coming in your classrooms, and you can't say because they are black, they can't do this.*

She was particularly proud of the accomplishments of her students who though expected to fail succeeded as she scaffolded instruction, beginning with explaining to the students what was expected of them, chunking the writing process and providing support throughout to help students succeed as she noted

*...So that was evidence, you know I knew to pre chunk everything...I created graphic organizers...students were able to take their notes on them...the students analyzed the task and we just did the writing process.*

### **How do organizational contexts show up in the stories of Black teachers choosing to remain in high-poverty, urban schools?**

The third question in my research inquiry addressed directly the idea of institutionalized racism. Historical accounts of race relations have created a system of hierarchy that support a

glass ceiling of equity. Through organizational structures that promote the power of privilege, i.e. the dominance of educational practices rooted in policy that fail students of color as evidenced by poor academic performance and low expectations for achievement, Black teachers are granted observation but reach a level where their contributions in cultural understanding and experiences are devalued (Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton, & Freitas, 2010). Through what Bell (1980) identified as interest convergence, institutional barriers to equitable educational practices are addressed only when the interest of the dominant culture collides with social justice reform. Consequently, teachers whose beliefs for social justice to reveal cultural bias in system policies and practices positioned them as outliers to the educational flow of academic accountability.

In discussing organizational structures, the participants raised several concerns about the need for professional development in diversity as it relates to teaching and learning. All the participants stated that they had not received any training pre-service or professional training in cultural responsiveness but would undoubtedly be willing to learn.

**Social Alienation and marginalization.** The participants did raise concerns about the challenges they faced when addressing race or class issues. For example, facing as a teacher of color “*a heavy, heavy burden ...when you are the only black colleague...*” or had been hurt based on race. Ann explained that when discussing opportunities for addressing race-related issues in professional conversations,

*...we're explaining this to you and your response was that we need to have a PLR – a positive response – positive learning environment and everyone looked at each other like did they just say that to us. We're telling you this, and you're not listening to us. And so that's why I feel like they're not getting it because they have not lived it. And we're telling you what they're {students} going through and this is what we can do.*

When addressing the idea of having a “safe space” to discuss race and race-related issues, all of the participants responded they had not experienced such a place in their practice. Gwen noted that

*It was more of let's just get through the day*

or as Freda stated, it could be a

*...touchy situation with children.*

However, she felt these conversations were easier with children rather than with adults because

*... they have their opinions ... it may lead to conflict.*

Denise related an incident when speaking with a colleague and sharing ideas about classroom management. She recounted the conversation with the colleague and noted,

*... someone said to me before basically - they listen to you because you're Black. It doesn't matter if you're white or Asian, Native American, Black, you still have to build a relationship with your students.*

However, each of the participants noted that they take every opportunity to teach their students about other cultures and to include in their delivery of instruction a variety of cultural practices beyond the designated Black history month. As Gwen stated,

*We are educating the future of America, and that means every ethnicity.*

**Stereotype Threat** (Steele, & Aronson, 1995). As noted through the work of Cornel West (2017), conversations regarding race matters must begin with addressing crippling cultural stereotypes that create barriers to meaningful conversations about the impact of race relations in America. Even though only two of the seven expressed incidents that reaffirmed to them the need to challenge misconceptions, it is important to note that their experiences are aligned with

the research and support the historically identified challenges of peoples of color in dispelling negative stereotypes. Barbara recounted an experience with a colleague where she felt the need to address misconceptions about parents of students of color. She explained

*... sometimes it was just a quick reference to a student that they came from a bad home without any validation to it. So for example you know this child has been disruptive in my class or they haven't brought their homework, I feel bad for them because of their home environment or the parents need to care more.*

In an effort to dispel this negative stereotype, Barbara clarified for her colleagues the challenges of parenting and the desires of actively participating in the education of their students by saying

*But when you call with just the positive praise report the parent may say thank you, I wish I could come more... I just got off and 3 hours I'm heading to my next job. Well that spoke volumes to me that did not say that the parent did not care, that just meant that this parent is struggling well not even struggling, this parent is doing whatever she has to do to provide for the family. ...Not to mention the location of the school, ...wasn't even in walking distance. You know I had to go back and let that teacher know, well I called the parent and did you know...so corrections were made, they had a different mindset for that child.*

Ann explained a situation in her experience where a White colleague stated:

*...we're their way out of the ghetto, and that really got all over me because there's simply not a ghetto...just that mentality...when you say ghetto, it is directed within a specific race and that's Blacks.*

She was adamant in her ire about the use of the term ghetto as being synonymous with "... low-level poverty kids - Black". She continued to explain that in her tenure, she was able to work

with administrators who recognized the need for cultural responsiveness and attempted to make efforts to advance learning in recognizing the need for this training.

Barbara also recounted an exchange within her classroom when a White student exclaimed loudly his surprise that a fellow Black student had taken honors-level courses in his previous predominantly students of color, high poverty school. She explained that this was an opportunity for her to address misconceptions in this area as she had first-hand knowledge of the Black students' capabilities academically as well as the opportunity for advanced learning afforded at this high poverty school. However, she was optimistic that these misconceptions

*...will change when their {White parents} children come home with good stories about the black children in their class.*

She summed up her response to the misconceptions when asked about the importance of training in diversity

*...they will understand, we will understand, even though I am Black, I don't always understand Caucasian culture either...And the kids won't feel like they don't like us anymore, they don't understand us anymore.*

It is interesting to note that the participants' responses solicited the idea that dispelling misconceptions was important. However, it would seem that the desire to prove a point to the dominant culture that students of color have value perpetuates the idea of internalized racism; embedded in belief that Black people should prove themselves worthy of recognition and understanding. Each of the participants has referenced personal experiences with racism within their practice, among their peers, and with their institutions of learning. However, assimilation to the dominant, middle class, white educational system appears to be the forefront of the challenges Black teachers face.

## **Conclusions**

This chapter contains the findings of this study in answering the research questions, and demonstrates consistency with narrative inquiry methodology. Seven participants interviewed for this study. All the participants were Black women with more than five years of teaching experience in predominantly Black urban schools. In the responses of the participants to the research question, I sought to reveal through their experiences the impact of how race matters in their decisions for remaining with their students. The findings of this study align with current research in this area, as expressed by Kraft et al. (2012) noting that teachers of color expressed their intentions to remain in urban schools due to their positive relationships with their students but also reflect a deeper challenge for Black teachers in the need to articulate specific protocols that will support their retention i.e. removal of institutional barriers that devalue their contributions and create hostile environments through racist practices and policies.

The design of the interview questions was to solicit responses from participants to glean an understanding related to the research questions supported by the tenets of race matters and storytelling/counter storytelling found in the Critical Race Theory. The themes developed from the participants' stories of why they remain in predominantly Black, urban schools are summarized as (a) seeing their role as one of disciplinarian, advocate and self-identify, destiny by design; (b) specific practices such as organization and building relationships, ability to make instruction relevant to cultural nuances; (c.) organizational contexts of alienation and to dispel misconceptions or judgmental attitudes. In conclusion, despite experiencing obstacles related to race or race related issues, only three of the seven participants were willing to remain with their students. Their challenges with alienation, marginalization, and lack of a safe space to discuss race-related issues were minimal in their optimistic effort to serve as role models for students of

color, champion social justice, and provide opportunities for advancement for all students, specifically students of color.

## Chapter V: Discussion and Implications

This qualitative research study delved into the lived experiences of Black teachers who have remained in the profession beyond five (5) years. The purpose was to gain an understanding of why they remained and to hear their stories. Therefore, a narrative inquiry approach was determined to be applicable to allow participants to express thoughts, concerns, and desires that may or may not factor in their decisions to remain with students of color in urban, high poverty schools. The research questions evolved from Critical Race Theory conceptual framework focusing specifically on the tenets of race matters and storytelling/counter storytelling. Learning from the experiences of Black teachers in education is essential for determining an approach for addressing the retention of teachers in urban schools. Despite the obstacles Black teachers face in addressing race and inequity of resources, many have found ways to reach out to their community, gain support, and remain in the field. The benefits of knowing their stories should guide future research in focusing attention on retention strategies.

In this research, I sought to hear from Black teachers, specifically those who desired to remain in predominantly Black population city schools, to ascertain whether their experiences was one of many stories told or is there one story; one experience told by many participants. I utilized Critical Race Theory as the theoretical framework to guide my exploration in explaining how race does matter. Through this exploration, I discovered that the stories told by each of us, is one story with varying experiences but similar conclusions.

Through this study with the theoretical framework of Critical Race Theory, I have shown that race does matter and that through counter storytelling, Black teachers' experiences challenge the dominant cultures' stories in educational organizations. Stories of overt and subvert racial barriers throughout educational practices reflect challenges to retention, even though recruitment



efforts for more teachers of color in public schools have shown success (Ingersoll & May, 2011). As noted in this study, more than half of the teachers who participated intended, determined prior to the study, to transition from the classroom and had made preparations by actively seeking other employment opportunities. They noted their intention to transition from the classroom was to pursue opportunities for advancement or enter private business in areas where they can make a difference in administrative and policy decisions that impact students of color.

In addition and based in personal experiences, these participants have questioned adverse educational dominance policies and practices for students of color. The findings support the research in questioning ideologies of colorblindness that have shown to present harmful effects on student achievement for students of color in low expectations and poor academic performance (Matias, 2016). In addition, the findings reflect how institutionalized racism has created barriers to culturally responsiveness in instruction that ultimately “push out” Black teachers from the profession (Collins, 1992; Delpit, 1988).

Utilizing CRT in this study helped to center perspectives in the historical context of attaining equity and social justice for communities of color. Teachers of color, i.e. Black teachers’ experiences reflect viewpoints that counter prevailing thoughts in educational practices deemed to be best practices for academic success for all students. These experiences are resounding in an exodus from the profession with continual negative impact on students of color in public schools, who have become the majority population in many areas. As many research studies have focused on recruitment and retention identifying factors for the exodus that are amenable by policy (Clotfelter et al., 2005; Fantilli and McDougall, 2009; Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012; Ladd, 2011), the findings of this study suggest that Black teachers desire to remain with their students is supported by their ability to make instruction relevant to cultural nuances as

well as advocate for students in support of academic achievement that dispel low expectations. These findings are also issues noted in the research as reasons (if not adequately and effectively supported in policy) for the exodus from the profession by Black teachers.

Through a focus on CRT principles over more than 30 years from Derrick Bell's (1980) declaration that the Brown case did not create the gains for teachers and students of color as was purported but in contrast reflected the interests of white policy-makers in upholding reform efforts for economic and political advantages is reflected in the responses of these participants as well as the institutional structures where they work. In fact, based on the tenet of interest convergence, racial equality was a by-product of the power of privilege assumed by dominant culture in establishing what is best for all cultures. Acting upon this assumption in educational policy, inequitable practices can simply be remedied with a focus on overturning these practices i.e. as with resorganization of school systems in an effort to align with mandates for the purpose of funding education. It fails to address the implicit and embedded racist practices by way of institutional barriers created in the educational system (Huber, Johnson, and Kohli's, 2006) . As noted by Bell (1980), when the interests of the dominant culture collide with the interests of non-dominant cultures, then will efforts be made to remedy the issue of inequity.

When these interest collide, the experiences of Black teachers are sought, even though they are often unheard through the dominant culture whose ideologies support what is deemed as best practices in educational theory (Achinstein and Ogawa, 2012). In the interest of retention, as noted by Ingersoll & May (2011), "... minorities have entered teaching at higher rates than whites over the past two decades, [yet} minority teachers also have left schools at higher rates."

p. 2. Recruitment of teachers of color in education have shown success, but retention has continued to decline more rapidly than White teachers serving in the same schools (Ingersoll &

May, 2011). Critical Race theory offers an explanation to challenge thought processes that relegate the experiences of Black teachers to one of radicalism particularly when prevailing ideas that race relations have shown improvement in that more Black teachers are advancing to administrative positions in the educational system. In listening to their experiences, I argue that the reasons behind the desire for advancement is to challenge the racist practices that hold students of color in a vise for academic achievement.

In addition, I would offer that school system policies and methods determined to be best practices fail to address the overt and covert racist conventions that undergird poor academic performances for students of color. I would further offer that students of color face low expectations for academic success through these policies as evidenced in multiple research studies (Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton & Freitas, 2010; Matias, 2016) . Teachers of color find themselves in a battle to support social justice reform efforts that would address institutional barriers to equity in education. Meaning that simply offering more rigorous content in education for all students and reorganizing school populations are masks for the underlying issues of implicit and explicit racial bias in working environments that devalue contributions from communities of color, poor academic preparation for students of color, and institutional barriers that support marginalization and alienation of non-dominant groups. I would also offer that the current system of educational practices has failed to successfully address the concerns of teachers of color in retention and by extension has not adequately addressed the continual growth of poor academic performance by students of color in urban, public schools. I would also offer that these same issues noted previously as hinderances to retention of Black teachers in urban schools are also factors in the possibility of retaining these same teachers, if adequately and effectively addressed.

The following subsections are offered through the the headings of the research questions. These questions focused the inquiry of retention of Black teachers to garner an understanding of factors that support their decisions to remain in urban schools.

### **How do Black teachers see themselves in the role of education?**

Despite all of the feelings of disillusionment that are sometimes prevalent in the experiences of teachers of color, there is an overwhelming optimism that drives determination. These teachers report their dedication is born from their struggles and their tenacity to provide for all students a better educational experience than their own.

**Connectedness and building relationships support retention.** As noted in ongoing research in teacher retention and aligned with this study, the participants' responses supported themes such as the need for relationships and connectedness to combat negative stereotypes and enlighten their students and colleagues about Black people (Milner & Hoy 2003). These participants stated they genuinely believe in their calling to the profession. They speak of personal identity with their students that few have outside of the race. They are quick to note that some White teachers have made these connections and have experienced success in their attempts to educate students of color. However, their unique perspective and unique connection with students of color remain paramount in their decision to remain with the profession. They expressed that with them and their driven purpose, students of color could have a better experience than their own.

In contrast to retention, participants expressed themes commonly associated with teachers of color leaving the profession. They discussed themes such as marginalization and alienation in curricula decisions, overwhelming demands for student achievement without adequate and equitable resources in their responses. These concerns are well aligned with the Critical Race

theory tenet interest convergence and property rights as noted in Bell's (1992) work. When the interest of the dominant culture is better served, then will the issues of race relations be addressed. In this case, it was addressed through the restructuring of the school system. These participants supported the overall optimistic approach of "things will get better" due mostly to the restructuring. Although what they referred to as the "family unit" experienced in their previous schools, was dismantled, the participants looked to restructuring for a more cohesive bond in support of students of color.

Reflecting on the tenet of matters of race noted in CRT, the participants' responses to race and race-related issues were not necessarily a focal point in their decision to remain with their students. Specifically, they chose to remain with their students, all students and not because they were Black but because they are teachers. However, their reported experiences relate to the importance of race in their practices, their pedagogy, their desires for providing their students with successful educational opportunities. This finding aligns closely with the body of research that supports a strong personal identity with students of color but also reflect a deeper commitment to support the need for the restructuring of educational practices that place barriers to academic success for students of color. For example, one of the participants related stories where their advocacy for students was a substantial factor in their decision to remain in the profession. As noted by another participant, serving as the person who understands the challenges students of color face was important to her decision to stay with her students. This participant related experiences of overcoming prescribed edicts that labeled her as a failure because of life circumstances of teenage pregnancy, living in low-income housing, and using government assistance programs. These challenges expressed not as judgment but as opportunity

to share with students that they too can elevate from low expectations to provide a better life for themselves and their children.

**Stereotype Threat.** Steele, & Aronson, (1995) defined this term in their research as “...being at risk of confirming, as self-characteristic, a negative stereotype of one’s group.” (p. 797). Participants identified occasions where they faced such stereotyping in their practice, specifically when countering negative opinions of communities of color. With relation to negative opinions of parental support in their student’s education, participants reported that white teachers formed negative opinions of the parents declaring they did not care about their child’s education. Participants strongly disagreed with this perception and advocated actively on behalf of the parents as they identified with parental struggles specifically in Black families. One participant expressed how she felt the need to challenge another white teacher’s comments about parents not attending parent/teacher meetings declaring that the lack of response was due to a lack of responsibility in their child’s education. Her challenge to colleagues identified a personal connection with students and parents of color as she related the importance of reaching out to assist parents and not judge or make stereotypical assumptions (Milner & Hoy, 2003). These responses align with the research literature supporting the need to dispel negative stereotypes. As noted by West (2017), focusing on these particular aspects (dispelling stereotypes) of the quest for racial equity in America, are the foundation to meaningful conversations in addressing race in American as well as the negative societal perceptions that undergird socioeconomic status of Black people.

**What specific practices told through their stories support them in remaining in urban schools?**

As aligned with CRT tenets and the value added by teachers of color as well as emphasizes on specific practices rooted in cultural backgrounds lend support to participants' pedagogical practices. Their responses to questions regarding specific instructional practices related their belief in successes was rooted in organizational strategies and building relationships with students and their families. They related experiences with utilizing methods to reach out to their students that proved successful in academic achievement as well as dispelling negative stereotypes for communities of color. Belief in students' abilities undergirded their need for support in pedagogical practices that differ from the dominant cultures' practices. This was evident in one participants' response of elation when she found that the restraints she experienced in strict adherence to a district determined curriculum was removed. In addition, the participants related instructional techniques that drew into their practices cultural nuances that allowed them to build relationships with their students. These strategies reflect the findings of this study that identified preparation for each day of instruction that included planning for every moment and ensuring that time was not wasted in the learning reflecting the personal commitment to students and the belief in the importance of education to success in life. In addition, the findings also reflect that a top priority in their practice was the significance of relationship building through recognition of environmental and cultural barriers to teaching and learning.

When asked about success stories where they thought they would fail, each of the participants spoke of times when they championed for their students' success. This success was particularly important as they related their belief that their district's previous organizational system was designed to segregate students and resulted in a lack of resources such as adequate textbooks and instructional materials. The research literature supports that high-quality teachers

experienced with delivering instruction in multiple formats to engage students' interest in meaningful content, and address learner needs are most effective in closing achievement gaps among students whose academic proficiency fall well below their peers (Amrein-Beardsley, 2012; Clotfelter et al., 2010). Based on the findings of this study that align with the research as evidenced by the participants' stories of their success stories with students' academic achievements despite the challenges they faced with inequitable access to resources, I would offer that it is imperative to the educational system to seek to change the institutional barriers that support low expectations for students of color.

**How do organizational contexts show up in the stories of Black teachers choosing to remain in high-poverty, urban schools?**

The impact of low expectations in curricular decisions, academic opportunities, and targeted pathways that deny students of color access to rigorous coursework for college or career readiness is paramount in addressing the importance of the tenet of Critical Race Theory, specifically race matters. As Matia (2016) noted addressing the idea of being blind to color, blind to race and race-related issues that undergird low expectations and low achievements were detrimental to the development of equity in education. These low expectations perpetuate negative assumptions for students of color and is found in various areas of schooling from class or course selections to textbooks or instructional materials selection, as well as to predetermined judgments based on stereotypes that result in disproportionate consequences for infractions. Participants in this study related how the educational system in their community consistently supported low expectations with school zones that aligned predominantly Black communities with inadequate access to local funding resulting in poor academic and financial support for schools while students in more affluent communities received greater access to locally funded



resources that support high performing schools i.e. community-based tutorial services.

Participant's responses noted that in such a system of disproportioned opportunities, high poverty students, many of whom were students of color, were bused across town. Due to the limited resources for transportation, many students and parents were far removed from opportunities to actively participate in their students' educational experience.

**In their own words.** As a challenge to the dominant culture in educational practices, the wealth of counter storytelling found in the voices of experience, the voices of exasperation, and the voices of excitement as educators drawn from teachers of color supported their desires to remain with their students. Participants expressed feelings of having been set up for failure but persevered despite the lack of resources, respect for them in the profession, and lack of recognition for the difficult work they accomplished. These were factors for which some of these Black teachers remain in the profession. Their experiences are aligned with current literature in retention of teachers. (Ahmad& Boser, 2014). However these responses counter the current research in that despite these challenges, their desire to remain is strong. Their experiences present the need to address inequities in educational opportunities for both teachers and students contrary to the dominant culture's assumption that they remain due to satisfaction with the working environment. The findings reflect that most of the participants expressed their intentions to transition from the classroom and were actively working toward that goal through completion of college coursework in a related field of study; developing plans for private business in education, or were actively seeking advancement from the classroom to administrative roles in education. None of the participants shared at the time of this study whether they had received or accepted offers to other positions. All participants remained as classroom teachers.

Through a narrative inquiry approach, a deeper level of understanding of the challenges and barriers present in institutions provide policy-makers with primary sources of data to address these issues. When organizations develop through the lens of one cultural perspective, non-dominant groups experience marginalization and alienation. These groups have stories that parallel the dominant group and often contradict and challenge the focus of that story. As these counter stories evolve, the tenet of interest convergence emerges through the participants' stories. They praised the school systems' restructuring as an opportunity for equity. However, as Bell (1980) noted, changes for equitable practices generally coincide with economic and community interests not necessarily in the interest of social justice.

Concerning the findings from this study, the participants tell a story that is reflective of the practices of marginalization and alienation that are prevalent in educational institutions. The participants repeatedly expressed their desire to remain to create "safe spaces" for students with access to equal opportunities in schooling. From their experiences, the participants relate the need for professional development that would support them in providing culturally responsive pedagogy but found those opportunities were not available. This lack of opportunity clearly viewed through critical race theory reflects that the interest of the dominant culture conflicts with the interest of marginalized people. According to the tenet of interest convergency, only when the dominant culture see value and need, will non dominant groups' interest be recognized.

As noted in the research literature, when teachers of color react to the dominant culture's lack of respect for their expertise or professionalism, they resort to silenced dialogue (Delpit 1998). The participants in this study also reported incidents when they too felt that their ideas were not valued or respected. Through their stories, the participants related incidents of maneuvering through conversations regarding low expectations for students of color among their

colleagues. Their overall response to such incidents was to “keep quiet because their minds were already made up.” However, despite feelings of frustration and discontent associated with a lack of respect, fewer than half of the participants remained dedicated to “seeing it through.” The response to the challenges were to dispel the illusion that these students can’t learn by providing students with instructional opportunities through scaffolded instruction to help students learn the more rigorous curriculum. Their attempt to address low expectations resulted in success for their students as they provided expertise in pedagogical practices in support of student academic performances.

### **Implications of the Findings**

Chapter II literature review embedded the research questions in current literature regarding retention of teachers, retention of black teachers, and retention of teachers in high poverty, urban schools. It further identified themes found in the literature for retention as well as reasons for leaving. The results of this study is situated within the current literature and apply to the greater body of research in teacher retention.

The voices of teachers of color in retention in education speak to a central focal point - institutional barriers of racism, whether overt or covert, in a Eurocentric educational system continue to be a major challenge in retention of Black teachers. Experiences of Black teachers are very similar in the oppressive practices of an educational system where the dominant culture’s values and beliefs define teaching and learning for all students. With more public schools becoming predominantly students of color, it is imperative that districts become more openminded to the reported experiences of Black teachers serving in predominately Black, urban schools. As noted in the research, reasons for retention and possible solutions are policy amendable. Therefore, educational systems must pay closer attention to policies that have

historically been unsuccessful in retaining teachers of color and by extension have supported poor academic performance for students of color.

In this study, Critical Race Theory served as a framework for gaining an understanding of the experiences of Black teachers. From this study, I identified commonalities among Black teachers' experiences in public education that must be addressed by educational systems.

Participants noted that the lack of a safe space for professional discourse in gaining understanding and insightfulness into teaching and learning through cultural responsiveness have not always been available or celebrated. Silenced dialogue (Delpit, 1988) and marginalization with alienation have served only to "push out" (Collins, 1992; Kohli and Pizzaro, 2016) both students of color and teachers of color. Educational systems would better serve students of color when changes to policies allow safe spaces for discussions of race related issues.

**Development of high-quality teachers is needed for culturally responsive instruction.**

Repeated research studies support the need for professionally developing teachers. High-quality teachers are developed (Darling-Hammond & Barate-Snowden, 2007; Looney, 2011). Quality teaching must have support from administration and address specific needs, be meaningful, and support utilizing expertise in the delivery of instruction for diverse populations. Participants in this study related incidents of feelings of inadequacy as novice teachers in the profession yet expected to perform at high levels mainly due to their perceived ability to relate to students of color or carry the "burden" of being the only teacher of color on the faculty in predominately Black urban schools.

Strong, consistent, sustainable mentoring programs are crucial to supporting novice teachers, especially those who experience challenging working conditions and feelings of being devalued as contributing members of the profession. Research has shown that mentoring and

training programs succeed based on the consistency of the program in meeting the needs of the teachers (Darling-Hammond 2004; Fantilli & McDougall 2009). Through these programs, participants' experiences are validated and supported. The findings of this study support teachers' requests for consistent, sustained, ongoing professional development in culturally responsive pedagogy.

**Teachers of color add value to instructional practices.** Teachers of color add experiences and understanding of cultural nuances that are inherent yet can be misunderstood or misinterpreted. These experiences help shape the structure of teaching and learning for students of color. They embody social justice and champion for equitable access to education. Their insights and perspectives add an understanding of marginalized populations. However, their practices and approaches reflect a contradictory approach to the majority trend in educational practices. The participants of this study recalled how their delivery of the curriculum supported their students' learning even when it challenged the prescribed methods. The findings of this study align closely with the research that teachers of color add value to instructional practices and speak to the need for policy changes that support their pedagogical practices (Kohli & Pizzaro 2016; Villegas & Irvine 2010).

### **Implications for educational administrators**

With the recent initiatives based on current research for the retention of teachers, more Black teachers are choosing teaching as a profession. However, research has also shown that these same teachers have not remained in the profession (Ahmad & Boser, 2014). Based on the findings of this study, participants interviewed identified themes that supported their decisions to remain in teaching. Among these themes are building relationships through connectedness with students and parents, personally identifying with the struggles as well as the cultural nuances of

their students, and the opportunity to advocate for increased awareness of subtle and overt racist practices that undergird belief systems of low expectations for students of color which have all created gaps in academic achievement between subgroups. In addition, the findings also reflect that the reasons for remaining are also identified reasons for departing if not adequately and effectively addressed.

Each of the participants noted that building relationships with their students and parents were the foundation of their practice. As participants champion for equitable practices, they noted their driving force was to ensure that students of color gained access to positive role models. Milner and Hoy (2003) also found that these factors were recurring themes in their study. As the demographic student body of urban public schools has evolved to more students of color taught by predominantly white female teachers, these Black teachers' contribution remains an integral part of their decisions to remain with their students. Developing teachers' cultural proficiency in instructional practices through professional development should be a focus for institutions of higher education in preservice training programs as well as school districts in retaining teachers of color.

While personally identifying with students of color is an inherent trait, institutions of learning and training programs can learn from experiences of these teachers whose insights in instructional delivery bear noting. Although the historical context of schooling has marginalized non-dominant populations, Black teachers have shown to add value that supports teaching and learning. A study in the ways that personal identity support students in academic achievement should provide concrete strategies for developing strong, culturally proficient practices. Marginalized populations have held little influence in curricular decisions yet their real experiences with alienation continue to be reasons for remaining with students of color. The

implications of this study revealed the growing concerns for the need for supporting social justice practices and culturally responsive pedagogy. Creating working conditions that foster safe spaces for discussions of race and race-related issues support the findings of this study as needed components in retaining teachers of color in urban, high poverty schools.

From this study, participants noted that challenging the status quo about notions of low expectations for students of color and negative connotations remained a strong reason for their decision to remain in the profession. Serving as an advocate for students of color revealed a deep-seated connection with such experiences of marginalized peoples. The findings of this study align closely with research presented by Kraft et al. (2012) outlining that reasons for retention among teachers of color were found in their desires to work with challenging populations where they had the opportunity to hone their skills, abilities, as well as a champion for social justice. Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton, & Freitas, (2010) also reported from research that teachers of color were committed to helping underprivileged students where they felt they could make a difference. The participants in this study also recounted their purpose in remaining as being positioned to utilize their skills in teaching and understanding of learning to support students who have experienced low performance. They concluded that remaining with these students was an opportunity to grow professionally while supporting children's educational goals through varying methods of delivery of instruction thereby challenging the notion that students could not perform at higher levels of learning. Scaffolding instructional strategies for students who historically performed below their White peers was of utmost importance to these participants. In addition, they expressed the desire for more input into policies and practices that undergirded curricular decisions. School districts should be called upon to continuously assess

practices embedded in policy and procedures through data that focus on alienating both teachers of color as well as students.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The participants for this research were from a single school district. All of the participants who responded to the request for the interview were Black women. This study does not address teachers of color other than those who identify as Black but recognize that other teachers of color may hold similar views and have a story to tell of their experiences as well. Individual interviews produced information into the personal insights from participants. However, a focused group approach through a case study analysis may have been more applicable to understanding whether the stories told are individual, isolated experiences or perhaps one collective story experienced by many individuals. Although this research intended to hear the stories of Black teachers' experiences, the lack of men's experiences is noted.

The following recommendations are offered based upon the stories told by the participants in the study. Schools and school districts have a professional responsibility for growing and developing the craft of teaching through support for teachers. There is a desire for professional development in cultural responsiveness. In this training, there is a need for safe spaces to discuss race and race-related issues as professionals. Race matters and cultural responsiveness in pedagogy and curriculum are necessary to address the continual marginalization of nondominant groups. I recommend districts address the need for policy changes such as flexibility in accountability mandates that fail to address the widening gap in academic performance of students of color i.e. standardized test instruments that devalue or exclude communities of color, standardized content with expectations of "common" knowledge and does not address cultural knowledge. In addition, I propose a focus on inclusion of cultural



responsive ideas that allow teachers of color to address district policies that marginalize students of color i.e. discipline policies, response to instruction policies, local culturally responsive curriculum decisions - community projects initiatives in communities of color.

District level educators should pay attention to the call for respected and meaningful collaboration in curriculum and pedagogical experiences of Black teachers. Educators are asking for respect in dialogue in curriculum issues, in value as a colleague in the profession, in recognition of the differences in practice that have proven successful for student achievement and growth.

Future studies should focus on the differences in experiences (i.e., isolation, alienation, and marginalization) of Black males and their reasons for remaining in the profession. Comparison of differences in gender and perceptions of responses to experiences by gender are areas not explored with reference to teachers of color remaining in the profession. Current research reflects that many Black teachers are leaving the profession faster than their White peers especially Black males (Ahmad & Boser 2014; Pabon 2016). More research is needed to address the concerns of Black teachers i.e. feelings of being devalued, experiencing hostile working conditions, and a lack of respect for the profession specifically as it relates to Black male teachers.

In addition, the need for further research to understand the intrinsic factors that undergird Black teachers' desire to remain in predominately Black urban schools is pressing. The findings of this research study identified extrinsic factors that support retention; however, an in-depth study of motivation as a theoretical framework would possibly outline more intrinsic factors that could support policy amendments.

Research should focus on whether teachers of color who do not identify as Black have similar experiences and express similar challenges as professionals, i.e. with the curriculum, decision making in curricular choices, delivery of instruction, overt racism or internalized racism/assimilation.

## **Conclusions**

With the guiding tenets of race matters, storytelling, and counter storytelling, my research investigated these questions:

- How do Black teachers see themselves in the role of education?
- What specific practices told through their stories support them in remaining in urban schools?
- How do organizational contexts show up in the stories of Black teachers choosing to remain in high-poverty, urban schools?

In response to the research questions, the following conclusions were drawn from the participants' responses to interview questions designed to support a narrative inquiry of their lived experiences. They remain as advocates for students of color. Race does matter. By identifying with their students of color, they report a connection of culture, identity, that motivates them to strive for excellence and expect no less from themselves and their students. All of the participants in the study referenced the importance of building relationships with students, support for teaching the whole child, and building upon the sense of community that undergirds Black culture.

From these findings, Black teachers remain because of destiny by design. They genuinely believe and are supported by their successes that their purpose in life is to teach. In doing so, their desires, despite obstacles, is to fulfill this call to service. As noted by participants,

relating content to students' experiences, identifying cultural nuances that enhance teaching and learning are skills embedded in Black teachers' practices. These nuances evolve from experiences and identity that support their belief in destiny by design.

Participants from this study also recognize the value in serving as role models to students of color. They determined that students of color must see someone who looks like them serving as a positive role model. They also remain to be that catalyst for change as they challenge the status quo of a middle class white educational system that has historically marginalized people of color. They have a story to tell and their story can be vastly different from the dominant culture's story and has value to students as well as the educational system when they are heard.

Teachers of color in urban schools are underrepresented in school systems (Achinstein, B., Ogawa, R. T., Sexton, D., & Freitas, C. (2010); Kohli & Pizarro, 2016). Since the time of political agenda for integration as noted in the Brown case, teachers of color, specifically Black teachers, have experienced institutional and individual marginalization and alienation that resulted in fewer entering the teaching profession. Those who did enter faced challenges to their identity, their pedagogical approaches, and their value as a professional educator. However, despite these obstacles, some teachers choose to remain in the profession. Only from the voices of their lived experiences will we gain enlightenment as they follow a parallel path of the dominant culture. Black teachers' contributions to the educational profession are vast and deeply rooted in struggle but optimistically administered for the next generation of students to have more significant opportunities for success both academically as well as socially. Because of the experiences shared by these participants, educational institutions must seek to be more inclusive, reflect greater respect for cultural responsiveness in all aspects of the educational system, and

systematically search to eliminate racist practices that drive out rather than draw in teachers of color.

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## **Appendix A**

### Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval Form

## Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval Form

**READ, PRINT AND RETAIN THIS DOCUMENT**

**The Auburn University Institutional Review Board**  
Office of Research Compliance – Human Subjects  
307 Samford Hall  
334-844-5966, fax 334-844-4391, [hsubjec@auburn.edu](mailto:hsubjec@auburn.edu)

**Investigators:** By accepting this IRB approval for this protocol, you agree to the following:

1. No participants may be recruited or involved in any study procedure prior to the IRB approval date or after the expiration date. (PIs and sponsors are responsible for initiating Continuing Review proceedings via a renewal request or submission of a final report.)
2. **All protocol modifications** will be approved in advance by submitting a modification request to the IRB unless they are intended to reduce immediate risk. Modifications that must be approved include adding/changing sites for data collection, adding key personnel, and altering any method of participant recruitment or data collection. Any change in your research purpose or research objectives should also be approved and noted in your IRB file. The use of any unauthorized procedures may result in notification to your sponsoring agency, suspension of your study, and/or destruction of data.
3. **Adverse events or unexpected problems** involving participants will be reported within 5 days to the IRB.
4. A **renewal** request, if needed, will be submitted three to four weeks before your protocol expires.
5. A **final report** will be submitted when you complete your study, and before expiration. Failure to submit your final report may result in delays in review and approval of subsequent protocols.
6. **Expiration** – If the protocol expires without contacting the IRB, the protocol will be administratively closed. The project will be suspended and you will need to submit a new protocol to resume your research.
7. **Only the stamped, IRB-approved consent document or information letter will be used** when consenting participants. Signed consent forms will be retained at least three years

after completion of the study. Copies of consents without participant signatures and information letters will be kept to submit with the final report.

8. You will not receive a formal approval letter unless you request one. ***The e-mailed notification of approval to which this is attached serves as official notice.***

## **Appendix B**

### Interview Protocol



## Interview Protocol

Thank you for participating in this research study to investigate the perspectives and lived experiences of African American teachers in urban schools who remain in the profession after the 3-5-year exodus. The study is being conducted by Debra Wright, Doctoral Student, under the direction of Dr. Lisa Kensler, Professor in the Auburn University Department of Education EFLT. You were selected as a possible participant because you identify yourself as African American with more than 5 years of experience in urban, high poverty schools and are age 19 or older.

**If you change your mind about participating**, you can withdraw at any time during the study. Your participation is completely voluntary. If you choose to withdraw, your data can be withdrawn as long as it is identifiable. Your decision about whether or not to participate or to stop participation will not jeopardize your future relations with Auburn University, the Department of Education EFLT.

Question 1 - What made you decide on teaching as a profession? Would you ever consider taking a break from your profession?

Question 2 –Have you ever succeeded when you thought you might fail while teaching in urban, high poverty minority schools?

Question 3 –What words of wisdom about teaching would you offer a new teacher in your building department?

Follow up: Are there any practices you believe others can learn or copy from you in teaching in urban, high poverty schools?

Question 4 –Has there ever been a time when you discussed issues of race and/or class in education among your colleagues or within your classes?

Follow up: Has there been a time when issues of race and/or class affected your decisions in teaching and learning?

Question 5 – How would you respond to the idea that the value of teachers of color is to serve as role models for students of color.

Question 6 –How does your school/system offer opportunities for collaboration among your peers for conversations in pedagogical practices?

Question 7 - What is your most memorable moment in your practice?