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The Impact of Select Personality Traits and Resilience on Teacher Retention in an  
Urban School District

By:

**Kira Baskerville-Williams**

Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education  
Department of Education, Management, Leadership and Policy

Dissertation Committee

Michael Kuchar, Ph.D., Mentor  
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January, 2020

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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES  
SETON HALL UNIVERSITY

APPROVAL FOR SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE

Kira Baskerville-Williams has successfully defended and made the required modifications to the text of the doctoral dissertation for the Ed.D. during this Fall Semester 2019.

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## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my sons, Jameel Williams and Simeon Williams. May they each know that education is a lifelong pursuit and that nothing is impossible, regardless of the challenges one may face. I love each of you with my whole being.

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Ruby Baskerville-Williams, and father, Clifton T. Baskerville Sr., because their support and dedication to the process has been all-consuming. They are the wind beneath my wings.

I dedicate this dissertation to my beloved grandmother, Jozella Conover, who I miss every day. Your unconditional love and unwavering belief in me continues to inspire me.

I dedicate this dissertation to my nieces and nephews with the hope that they realize their own greatness and decide to work hard for what they believe.

I dedicate this dissertation to my young family members who are deciding how they want their own lives to unfold. May they seek inspiration in the journey.

Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to my ancestors who sacrificed so much—this is for you. I am the hope of the slave, the vision of freedom, the reason for the struggle, and the reason why they kept living. I bow my head to you in reverence and gratitude. Your strength and perseverance humble me.

## **Acknowledgments**

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I also want to thank my family and friends for being staunch supporters of my work and my journey through life. Your undying love and support were my beacon when life challenged me. I want to thank my parents for believing in me, for building resiliency in me, and for never allowing me to quit anything I started. It paid off in a big way! I want to thank my brother and his family for their love and support. I want to thank my sons for giving me the inspiration to push and for giving me a reason to strive higher. Moreover, there are indeed those special influencers in my life who make me feel capable and hold me accountable for developing the gifts God gave me. Thank you!

I want to acknowledge my loved ones who are no longer here on this earth with me but whose love and presence I feel every day. So much of who I am today is because of who each of you were and how much you poured into me growing up. I know you are proud.

## **Abstract**

This study examined the challenge of teacher attrition in urban school settings. Currently, there is a gap in the literature that addresses the type of teacher most likely to stay in the profession past the 5-year mark, particularly in urban districts. Using personality theory and resilience theory as the theoretical framework, this study explored the influence of select personality traits and resilience on teacher retention in an urban school district. This study sought to identify whether conscientiousness and emotional stability influence teacher retention past the 5-year mark. This study also sought to identify whether resilience influences teacher retention past the 5-year mark.

A case study design was selected to explore the phenomenon of teachers who have demonstrated longevity by providing 5 or more years of service teaching in a select urban district in Northern New Jersey. A total of 20 volunteer participants were selected to take part in a confidential semi-structured interview that lasted approximately 45 minutes and included a self-rating scale on both personality traits and their perception of how (if at all) resilience played a part in their longevity as an urban educator. Upon completion of the interviews, the data was analyzed using four types of coding for the first cycle: emotion coding, in-vivo coding, value coding, and descriptive coding. Second cycle coding was done utilizing pattern code analysis.

This study revealed that teacher resilience is crucial to teacher retention past the 5-year mark. Current literature indicates that two personality traits, emotional stability and conscientiousness, are indicators of employee retention in the general workplace. The findings of this study demonstrated that while emotional stability and conscientiousness do not influence teacher retention in an urban setting, resiliency does have an influence on teacher retention in an urban setting. The findings in this study also suggested that teachers do consider themselves resilient and believe resiliency to be a prerequisite to teaching in an urban school district.

Keywords: Teacher retention, teacher resiliency, urban education, personality traits, emotional stability, conscientiousness, resiliency, teacher attrition, teacher turnover, urban education.



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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Teachers are exiting the field of education at an alarming rate. Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) stated that 90% of open teaching positions are due to teachers exiting education. In addition, Geiger and Pivovarov (2018) stated that “each year, over one million teachers enter, exit, or transition between schools and districts in the U.S. (p. 605). Likewise, McLaurin et al. (2009) asserted that roughly one quarter of entering public school teachers will leave the profession within the first 3 years of teaching. Research indicates that the shortage of teachers that the country is currently experiencing is due to teachers exiting the profession within the first 5 years of teaching, as opposed to the inability to recruit teachers at a fast-enough rate (McCartney & Brill, 2008). Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) asserted that shortages of teachers are particularly great in the areas of math, science, special education, English language development, and foreign languages. The rate of teacher attrition has increased dramatically in underserved urban schools; thus, its impact on staff and students is much harsher. According to the National School Boards Association (2017), “annually, teacher turnover in high-poverty, high minority, urban schools can top 20%, a rate 50% higher than more affluent schools” (Seidel, 2014). Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) posited a 50% higher turnover rate in Title I schools and a 70% higher turnover of teachers in schools that serve the largest concentration of students of color. For the purpose of this study, an urban school district as defined by the U.S. Department of Education is a facility that provides education inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city classified according to population size by large, mid-sized, or small (2006). Loeb et al. (2011), in their study of teacher turnover in urban sectors, asserted:

Teacher turnover has a compounding effect on low-income schools. Teachers leave before they gain the necessary experience to become effective. When they

leave, low-income schools have a difficult time attracting new teachers so end up hiring inexperienced and less prepared teachers. (p. 2)

Clotfelter et al. (2010) asserted that “schools with large proportions of non-white or low-income students tend to have teachers with far weaker qualifications than those in schools serving white or more affluent students” (p. 1). Moreover, Howard (2008) summarized the consequence of teacher attrition indicating less teachers in specialized areas, increased class sizes, and an overall lack of teacher quality (in other words, teachers who are not certified to teach and/or underprepared) (p. 142). Jacobs (2007) further confirmed that teachers in schools serving poor and minority children in urban cities are more likely to be less experienced, more likely to be teaching subjects that they are not certified to teach, and less likely to be certified overall. Jacobs (2007) also added that teachers teaching in urban districts are less likely to have graduated from competitive colleges and also scored lower on standardized exams.

These impediments to quality instruction hinder student achievement and have a detrimental effect on student and school morale (Loeb et al., 2011). Staff cohesiveness and school culture and climate are negatively impacted as well (Loeb et al., 2011). The financial cost of high teacher turnover cannot be overlooked; according to Bacher-Hicks et al. (2017) the financial cost of hiring in urban districts is between \$10,000 and \$20,000. The expense of hiring new teachers, substitute teachers, orientation, professional development, and the mentoring process takes away from monies that could be spent in the retention and training of high-quality teachers, programs, and other activities that benefit children and the school (Loeb et al., 2010). According to Loeb et al. (2010):

Underserved schools tend to have more persistent turnover so suffer higher costs in keeping their classrooms staffed; moreover, they tend to have fewer resources

to begin with, making it more difficult to absorb the cost of turnover or to invest in costly program improvements. (p. 2)

Urban school districts face unique challenges that are separate from suburban school districts and rural school districts. Jacobs (2007) asserted that while urban and rural schools resemble each other as it pertains to poverty, immigrant children, and high rates of mobility, many urban cities have bleak rates of unemployment, poverty, and crime. Jacobs (2007) further stated:

Many inner-city neighborhoods suffer from poor social capital—the informal connections between people that help a community monitor its children, provide positive role models, and give support to those in need ... large urban districts are more likely to have complicated bureaucratic systems that prevent them from acting quickly and decisively. (pp. 130-132)

Teachers have cited many reasons for leaving the profession. The reasons most often cited are the stressful conditions many must endure in the workplace (Greenfield, 2015). The inner-city setting has more stressful conditions than other types of districts, with less support (Simon & Johnson, 2013). Determining what type of teacher can withstand these stressful conditions is critical to education, especially urban education. The unique needs seen in urban education require teachers who have the capacity to meet those needs and remain in the setting.

In an attempt to retain teachers, researchers have identified several areas that they believe will have a bearing on a teacher's decision to leave the profession (Hughes et al., 2014). A few of the areas that have been explored include increasing teacher salaries, having teacher induction programs, providing an abundance of professional collaboration opportunities, and increasing administrative support, particularly from the principal. Hughes et al. (2014) cited support of

teachers as having a critical impact on teacher retention in schools that are hard to staff. The support that was most valued was principal support, particularly emotional support (p. 132).

While there has been much discussion about what it takes to keep a teacher within the teaching profession, there has been little discussion about the type of teacher most likely to stay in the profession. Furthermore, there has been little discussion about the type of teacher most likely to stay within an inner-city school environment. Jacobs (2007) stated that “schools do not hire the right types of teachers” (p. 139). Jacobs (2007) further asserted that working conditions appear to be more important than wages, particularly for teachers teaching in urban school districts. Working conditions detrimental to teacher retention include environments where class sizes are large and schools are plagued with discipline and gang problems. Lack of student achievement, lack of parent involvement, and high absenteeism and transience are also factors inhibiting retention (Jacobs, 2007), as are lack of administrative supports, high administrative turnover, and chaotic organizational structures (Jacobs, 2007).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to seek a solution to teacher attrition in urban school districts. This study identified personality traits and levels of resilience that are present in teachers within urban school districts who stay in the teaching profession for more than 5 years. The results of this study will provide hiring managers with tools which will allow them to construct better hiring policies and practices and maximize the recruitment process.

### **Research Questions**

Research Question 1: What was the influence, if any, of personality traits on teacher retention in an urban school district?

Research Question 2: What was the influence, if any, of resilience on teacher retention in an urban school district?

Research Question 3: To what extent, if any, did participants believe they were resilient?

Research Question 4: To what extent, if any, did personality traits affect resilience?

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problem of teacher retention was addressed through this study's attempt to look at the profile of teachers who remain in the teaching profession within the urban school district for over 5 years. This study sought to determine whether or not the resilience of a teacher and/or certain personality traits play a factor in teacher retention. Currently, there is a high attrition rate of teachers who are leaving the profession during the early years of a career; one third of new teachers leave within their first 5 years of teaching (Yonezawa et al., 2011). The recruiting, hiring, and training process for new teachers leads to annual spending of \$2.2 billion to \$4.9 billion (Brill & McCartney, 2008) and causes a substantial loss of talent and energy when these teachers leave (Yonezawa et al., 2011).

Investigating the personality traits and the measure of resilience among teachers who have been in the education field for more than 5 years has major implications for hiring practices because it gives those who hire insight into which traits have the most influence on teacher retention in urban school settings. A recent study (Fernandez-Mesa et al., 2017) used the Five Factor Personality Inventory to identify the influence of personality traits on employees' continuance commitment to an organization. The inventory includes openness to experience, neuroticism, responsibility, extraversion, and agreeableness. The results of this study found that employees' level of responsibility and openness to experience were related to employees' continual commitment, while agreeableness and extraversion had no effect on commitment. The study also noted that employees with a high degree of neuroticism (emotional stability) are more likely to stay in an organization, even when they are not so highly appreciated (Fernandez-Mesa et al., 2017). These employees' poor management of both stress and new situations means they

tend to be less productive, which is important information for any individual hiring employees to know and understand because of the impact such individuals have on students and the organization as a whole (Fernandez-Mesa et al., 2017).

Many theories abound related to the reasons for teacher attrition in urban school districts (Loeb et al., 2011). The literature on personality traits and resilience and their influence on teacher retention in urban school settings is limited. There have been few quantitative and qualitative research studies on personality traits and resilience and their exploratory relationship to teacher retention. Therefore, a case study was conducted analyzing the personality traits and resilience of teachers within urban school districts, and their influence on teacher retention.

### **Significance of the Study**

Taking a deeper look at what personality traits a teacher must possess to stay and flourish under such highly stressful conditions is critical to understand. The knowledge gained from this understanding has the potential to impact urban school districts and their hiring practices by identifying applicants who are resilient and have personality characteristics favorable to sustainability within urban school districts. This study on the impact of teacher personality characteristics—mainly the traits of conscientiousness and emotional stability—as they relate to retention in an urban school district was necessary and important to the field of education. This study investigated personality characteristics in teachers who have been in the teaching profession for over 5 years within an urban school district. Some studies have investigated teacher personality types and their relationship to the subjective well-being and academic achievements of students (Eryilmaz, 2014). This study builds upon and adds to previous studies by investigating personality characteristics related to teacher retention within an urban school district.



Furthermore, this study investigated the presence of resilience in teachers who have stayed in the teaching profession for more than 5 years. Tait (2008) defined resilience as the human capacity to face, overcome, and even be strengthened by experiences of adversity (p. 58). Moreover, Ledesma (2014) defined resilience as the ability to bounce back from adversity, frustration, and misfortune; one that is essential for the effective leader. According to Gu and Day (2013), “although resilience among children has been well studied by researchers from multiple disciplines, there remains limited empirical work on resilience in teachers” (p. 25). Keogh et al. (2010) discussed the need to develop resilience in teachers to increase the retention rate among newly qualified teaching graduates. Thus, by examining teacher resilience in urban schools, one gains a conceptual understanding of the longevity of successful teachers (Yonezawa et al., 2011). Ledesma (2014) described sustained resilience as career resilience, which relates to a person’s resistance to a career disruption in a less than optimal environment and the ability to handle poor working conditions while one is aware that these conditions exist. Yonezawa et al. (2011) asserted that “the importance of reducing teacher turnover and increasing teacher resilience is becoming increasingly clear as we learn more about the connection between student-teacher relationship and student academic achievement” (p. 927).

Taylor (2013) asserted that teacher resiliency is a critical element in teacher retention, further noting the need for the teaching profession to require resiliency in teachers because of the challenges in education today. Taylor (2013) stated that “when teachers are resilient, they are better able to assess adverse situations and determine options for coping, in addition to implementing the appropriate solutions” (p. 2). Keogh et al. (2010) posited that resilience can be taught to novice teachers and that helping teachers build resilience skills may counteract the high rates of attrition. However, other researchers believe that resilience, particularly ego resilience,

is a meta-level personality trait (Prince-Embury, 2013). Metatraits are defined as the trait of having or not having a particular trait (Liebert, 1998)

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical frameworks supporting this study are Jung's (1921) personality theory and Block and Block's (1950) resilience theory. The personality theory is derived from the work of Carl Jung and the resilience theory is derived from the work of Emmy Werner (1954). The Five Factor Model stems from Jung's personality theory and Ego Resiliency stems from Block and Blocks' resiliency theory.

#### **Personality Theory**

While there are many personality theorists, what separates Jung's work from others is his identification of typology, which would later form the basis of trait theory. In Jung's 1921 book *Psychological Types* he provides a general description of the psychological types, which he termed introverted and extraverted. He referred to the two terms as "attitudes" and further differentiated between the two when he recognized that both attitudes can be present within an individual. Jung discussed one attitude taking on a superior role in a person and the other acting as an inferior attitude (Jung, 1921). He noted that the superior function is always the expression of the conscious personality, while the inferior function is in the subconscious realm and can operate without consideration or responsibility (p. 428). Jung (1921) further asserted that "a personality can appear both introverted and extraverted so that one cannot decide to which attitude the superior function belongs" (p. 428). Thus, Jung developed four function qualities to help further distinguish personality types. The first function was the feeling function, which he described as a method by which a person understands the value of conscious activity. The second function was the thinking function, which allows a person to understand the meaning of things. The third function is sensation, by which a person knows that something does exist. The

fourth function is intuition, by which a person knows about something without conscious understanding of where that knowledge comes from (Jung, 1921).

## **Resilience Theory**

Expounding on Jung's personality theory, the study looked at specific personality traits and the trait of resilience to help decipher their impact on retaining teachers within urban school districts.

Farkas and Orosz (2015) noted that the notion of "resiliency" was conceptualized in the 1950s and first reported by Jack and Jeanne Block (1950, 1951) in a psychological context, which led to a great deal of research on resilience during the 1970s. As the concept of resilience developed, key points from the resilience literature began to emerge (Forbes & Fikretoglu, 2018). Forbes and Fikretoglu (2018) asserted that an individual cannot develop resilience if he/she is not exposed to some risk, and that it might only become apparent when the individual faces adversity. Moreover, resilience can come from physiological, psychological, or environmental factors. Lastly, long after an adverse experience has subsided, resilience can be seen to remain in that individual.

Because teacher resiliency is such a critical element in teacher retention (Taylor, 2013), investigating its influence was an integral part of this study. The theoretical frameworks for this study supported the literature review on teacher attrition, teacher retention, resiliency, and personality traits by providing a unique and alternative lens through which to view and assess attrition and retention of teachers, particularly within urban settings.

## **Organizational Framework**

The literature review used in this study investigated the use of personality traits and resilience in organizations and their influence on educators and retention. The factors revealed in the literature review were organized into three domains with subcategories. The three

domains are entitled: Reasons for Teacher Attrition, Impact of Teacher Attrition, and Teacher Retention. The subcategories for Reasons for Teacher Attrition include: Student Behavior, Low Salary, and Workplace Conditions. The subcategories for Impact of Teacher Attrition include: Economic Costs of Teacher Turnover, Impact of Teacher Turnover on the Institutions, Impact of Teacher Turnover on the Student-Teacher Relationship, and Impact of Teacher Turnover on Student Achievement. The subcategories for Teacher Retention include: Resiliency, Grit, Personality Traits, and Impact of Personality Traits on Teacher Retention.

The first domain and subcategories based on Jung's theory of personality (and more specifically, trait theory) were thought to be a driving force in why teachers are exiting the profession, which in turn segued into the second domain and subcategories: the impact of teacher attrition on the institution of education. The underlying assumption was that certain beginning teachers were not able to remain in the profession under such stressful and unpleasant working conditions due to innate personality traits, which supports Jung's theory of personality (Jung, 1921). When an urban school setting is added, attrition is exacerbated by the low socio-economic status, high minority schools, poor administration, lack of community and parental support, and low student engagement (Simon & Johnson, 2013).

The third domain and subcategories were thought to add to or be a driving force behind why beginning teachers remain in the teaching profession. This relates to Jung's theory of personality (Jung, 1921). The relationship between two personality traits taken from the five-factor model and levels of resilience on teacher retention in urban schools is the purpose of the study.

### **Research Design**

This study used a qualitative research design with interviews of practicing teachers who have been in the field of education for more than 5 years. The qualitative design allowed for a

deeper look at urban teachers, their personality characteristics, and their level of resilience as well as its impact on their retention in a northern urban school district. Qualitative research is a collection, analysis, and interpretation of comprehensive narrative with the purpose of gaining insight into a particular phenomenon of interest (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The phenomenon of interest that this study focused on is teacher retention in an urban school district. The goal of this qualitative research was to analyze what a set group of teachers' experiences means for larger processes and phenomena. Because this study attempted to obtain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, a case study was the methodology used to investigate the relationship between teacher retention and personality traits and resilience within an urban school setting.

### **Limitations**

This study was limited in the following ways: 1. This study identified teachers of all grade levels throughout one urban district in the United States. 2. This study relied on self-reporting as volunteer participants had to answer interview questions. 3. The study relied on participants answering honestly and to the best of their ability. 4. Participants' interpretation of the questions had a major impact on the outcome of the data. 5. Furthermore, this study relied on the ability of the participants to be introspective when reporting. 6. Participants' lack of introspective quality may have led the participant to report inaccurate data. 7. Moreover, response bias may have impacted the study; in other words, if participants generally responded a particular way, it would influence the reliability of the study. 8. Lastly, the research of the study may not be generalizable in districts outside of urban districts.

### **Delimitations**

An interview was selected to attract more teacher volunteers. 1. Time constraints may have caused difficulty in recruiting teacher volunteers. 2. Another delimitation was exclusion of teachers working in the profession for less than 5 years because the research identified retention

in a time frame of 5 years or more. 3. This study did not look at districts across the county and country, but instead investigated personality characteristics and resilience occurring within one urban school district.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Ego Resiliency.** An individual's ability to temporarily adapt his or her level of control up or down as the situation dictates (Block, Funder, & Letzringa, 2004).

**Five Factor Model.** A set of five broad trait dimensions or domains, often referred to as the "Big Five": Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism (sometimes identified by its polar opposite, Emotional Stability), and Openness to Experience (sometimes called Intellect) (Boyle, 2008).

**National Center of Educational Statistics (NCES).** The primary federal entity for collecting and analyzing data related to education (NCES, 2016).

**Teacher Attrition.** The rate at which new teachers leave the profession (Delvaux, Dupriez, & Lothaire, 2016).

**Urban School District.** A facility that provides education inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city classified according to population size by large, mid-sized, or small (New Jersey Department of Education, 2006). Further definition includes high needs schools located in cities across America with high-risk, low-income students (Dictionary.com, 2014).

### **Organization of the Study**

Chapter 1 framed the problem associated with teacher attrition, particularly as it relates to urban school districts. The study further investigated the influence of personality traits on teacher retention and the potential impact of the study on hiring practices and policies related to potential teachers. The study examined how personality traits influence teacher retention for teachers working within urban school settings for the entire 5 or more years of their career.

Chapter 2 reviewed the literature on teacher retention and attrition and identified the problem areas within urban school districts. The literature examined the impact of high teacher turnover on urban school settings and on student achievement. Furthermore, a literature review was conducted to examine personality characteristics of teachers and reviewed personality inventories, looking closely at the validity and reliability of three major inventories. An additional inventory was reviewed to look closely at the role played by reliability in a teacher's ability to remain within highly stressful school settings.

Chapter 3 outlined the research design, emphasizing the methods and procedures used for this study. The data collected for this study was retrieved from interviews of volunteer participants. The data analysis was described within this chapter.

Chapter 4 included the data and findings of the study. An interpretation of the results was conducted.

Chapter 5 provided implications for practice and policy. Recommendations and suggestions for further research were also included in this chapter.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Historical Framework

The practice of studying personalities can be traced back to Carl Jung in the early 1920s. Dennison, Lee, and Weber (2015) asserted that “Carl Jung initially suggested that people are different in fundamental ways even though they have the same multitude of instincts” (p. 325). Jung assigned four psychological functions to individuals: sensation, feeling, thinking, and intuition. He believed that one of the four psychological functions made up the dominant personality of an individual (Jung, 1971).

A doctoral dissertation entitled “The Relationship Between Personality Traits and Transformational Leadership” credited Jung for developing two distinct personality types called Introvert and Extrovert (Megrattan, 1997). Introverts were those who drew their energy from the inner world of ideas, emotions, and impressions, while the extroverts drew their energy from the world outside of themselves. Jung built on this concept by identifying eight possible psychological types.

When the four functions combined with one of his two attitudes, Jung formed eight varying personality types. They were extroverted thinking, introverted thinking, extroverted feeling, introverted feeling, extroverted sensing, introverted sensing, extroverted intuition, and introverted intuition. *Extroverted thinking* is an understanding of the world through a mix of concrete ideas and abstract concepts, with the abstract concepts passed down from other people. *Introverted thinking* is the interpretation of stimuli in the environment through a subjective and creative way. The interpretations are informed by internal knowledge and understanding. *Extroverted feeling* is the value of things, which are based on objective fact. There is a level of comfort in social situations, and opinions are formed based on socially accepted values and majority beliefs. *Introverted feelings* are judgments based on subjective ideas and internally



established beliefs. Oftentimes prevailing attitudes are ignored and social norms of thinking are defied. With *extroverted sensing*, the world is perceived as it really exists and perceptions are not colored by any pre-existing beliefs. With *introverted sensing*, the world is interpreted through the lens of subjective attitudes and things are rarely seen only for what they are. Sense is made of the environment only by giving it meaning based on internal reflection. *Extroverted intuition* is when the meaning of things is understood through subliminally perceived objective facts rather than incoming sensory information. There is a reliance on hunches, and perceptions received directly from the senses are disregarded. Lastly, *introverted intuitive* individuals are profoundly influenced by their internal motivations even though they may lack understanding of those internal motivations. The meaning is found through unconscious, subjective ideas about the world (Jung, 1921).

Darowski and Darowski (2016) stated that “Jung’s theory of personality was born out of his psychotherapy practice and thus is inextricably connected to his analytical psychology movement” (p. 28). Furthermore, Salman (2008) noted that Carl Jung’s personality theory implies that there are various ways not only of apprehending but also of functioning in the world, an idea which has carried over into the world of business management.

From Jung’s distinct work on personality typology, trait theory emerged. Trait theory is an approach to studying human personality that identifies and measures the degree to which certain personality traits, recurring patterns of thought and behavior, exist from individual to individual (Liebert & Spiegler, 1998). Moreover, trait theory’s website defines trait theory as “an approach to studying human personality that identifies and measures the degree to which certain personality traits exist from individual to individual” (<http://www.traittheory.com>, p. 1, n.d.). Allport (1936, cited in Liebert & Spiegler, 1998), the founding father of trait theory,

asserted that traits are basic units of personality and are a part of the person (Liebert & Spiegler, 1998). In the textbook *Personality: Strategies and Issues*, Liebert and Spiegler (1998) described Allport's eight theoretical assertions in the following manner:

Traits have more than nominal existence, whereas, traits are a part of the person. In addition, traits are more generalized than habits; traits are dynamic and determine behavior (traits direct action and are not mere structural artifacts). Moreover, traits may be established empirically and traits are only relative independent of other traits. Traits are not synonymous with moral or social judgments and may be viewed either in the light of the personality that contains them or in the light of their distribution in the population. Finally, acts, and even habits, that are inconsistent with a trait are not proof of the nonexistence of the trait. These assertions have been the building blocks for trait theorists ever since. (p. 195)

Building on the foundation of Carl Jung, psychologists Gordon Allport and Henry Odbert conducted a seminal lexical study of the personality. Allport and Odbert (1936) stated that "measurement is possible only if we blindly insist that people are comparable in respect to each 'common trait'" (p. 15). To begin the process of developing ways to measure personality, Allport and Odbert fit "17,953 words or 4-1/2% of the total English vocabulary" (p. 24) into four major categories.

- Category I: Real traits of the personality, which designate generalized and personalized determining tendencies. Terms that were considered appropriate for this category were thought to be consistent and stable modes of an individual's adjustment to his environment. Examples include: aggressive, sociable, introverted, deliberate, dishonest, etc.
- Category II: Terms descriptive of present activity or temporary states of the mind and mood. These terms were not considered to be permanent states or recurring moods. Examples include: frantic, rejoicing, flirting, flinching, etc.

- Category III: Terms that were considered characterizable evaluations. Examples include: flawless, acceptable, worthy, insignificant, keep-worthy, labored, etc.
- Category IV: Terms that were considered miscellaneous, in which clear examples were not so easily found; terms based on physical characteristics, capacities, and talents. Examples include: devious, overpowered, abstract, lackey, rusty, etc. (Allport & Odbert, 1936, p. 24)

Because of Allport and Odbert's work, psychologist Raymond Cattell (1970) built upon the research and created a taxonomy using Allport and Odbert's (1936) list as a starting point for the development of a multi-dimensional model of personality structure. Cattell took a subset of 4,500 trait terms and reduced them to 35 variables, which eventually led to the development of 12 personality factors that ultimately became 16 (John & Pervin, 1999). Two major personality tools are used today: The Big Five and the Myers-Brigg Type Indicator (MBTI).

### **The Big Five**

Cattell's (1970) work on narrowing down personality traits led other researchers to work on and create what is known as the Big Five Factor (John & Pervin, 1999). The Big Five Factor was established by a landmark study done in 1958. In a study entitled "The Big Five Trait Taxonomy: History, Measurement, and Theoretical Perspectives," John and Srivastava (1999) stated: "This five-factor structure has been replicated by Norman (1963), Borgatta (1964), and Digman and Takemoto-Chock (1981) in lists derived from Cattell's 35 variables. These factors eventually became known as the 'Big Five' (Goldberg, 1981)—a title chosen not to reflect their intrinsic greatness but to emphasize that each of these factors is extremely broad" (pp. 6-7).

Table 1.  
*Original Five-Factor Structure*

<b>Five Factor Structure</b>	<b>Component Traits</b>
Extraversion or Surgency	Talkative, assertive, energetic
Agreeableness	Good-natured, cooperative, trustful
Conscientiousness	Orderly, responsible, dependable
Emotional Stability	Calm, not neurotic, not easily upset
Culture	Intellectual, polished, independent-minded

*Note.* Adapted from “An Investigation of The Big Five, Narrow Traits, and Positive Psychology in Relation to Life Satisfaction,” by Sara Elizabeth Connor, 2008, University of Tennessee, Knoxville Trace: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange Doctoral Dissertations Graduate School. Copyright 2008 by the University of Tennessee.

A doctoral dissertation entitled “An Investigation of the Big Five, Narrow Traits, and Positive Psychology in Relation to Life Satisfaction” (2008) credited psychologists Tupes and Christa (1958) with giving the Big Five Factor its first theoretical framework. Connor (2008) stated:

Tupes and Christa investigators found five personality factors that, when rated by peers, predicted later office performance. These factors were termed by the researchers as (a) surgency (Extraversion in the Big Five), (b) agreeableness, (c) dependability, (d) emotional stability, and (e) culture (Openness in the Big Five). This constitutes the first emergence of a five-factor model of personality, which differs from today’s Big Five model only in the names of the factors. (pp. 7-8)

According to Conner (2008), “Another prominent researcher in this area is Goldberg (1981, 1982, 1990, 1992), who produced much research in the 80’s and early 90’s that established psychometric support for the Big Five” (p. 8). Goldberg’s work laid the foundation for continued work in the area, in which the stability, reliability, and central roles in personality

were established and thought to remain constant throughout the lifetime. The five personality factors that make up The Big Five are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.  
*The Big Five*

<b>Big Five Trait</b>	<b>Component Traits</b>
Extraversion	Sociability, gregariousness, talkativeness
Agreeableness	Sympathy, trust, cooperation, good-natured
Conscientiousness	Discipline, order, diligence, reliability
Neuroticism	Anxiety, self-consciousness
Openness	Curiosity, imaginativeness

*Note.* Adapted from *Handbook of personality: Theory and research* (2nd ed.) by O. P. John & L. A. Pervin, 1999. Copyright 1999 by The Guilford Press, N.Y./London.

John and Pervin (1999) cited a strength of The Big Five, stating: “it can capture at a broad level of abstraction, the commonalities among most of the existing systems of personality traits, thus providing an integrative descriptive model for research” (p. 122). However, weaknesses have also been identified because of the perceived failure of The Big Five to capture a completed theory of personality. John and Pervin (1999) further noted that “The Big Five does not capture all of the variations in the human personality” (p. 124).

The Big Five has evolved into what is commonly referred to as the Five-Factor Model (FFM).

### **Ego Resiliency**

Farkas and Orosz (2015) observed that the notion of “resiliency” was conceptualized in the 1950s and first reported by Jack and Jeanne Block (1950, 1951) in a psychological context, which led to a great deal of research on resilience during the 1970s. Initially the concept was

applied to children and was known as “invulnerability or stress-resistance; youngsters who did not have any psychopathology despite very difficult childhood circumstances were thought to be characterized by this trait. Later this research encompassed many different models” (p. 2). Werner conducted the first longitudinal study on resilience in 1954, studying and following a cohort of children throughout their lives.

Block and Block (1980) expounded on resilience theory by investigating the role of the ego in resilience. Prince-Embury (2013) stated, “Block’s conception of ego-resiliency in adults was distinct from the developmental conceptions of resilience that focused on bouncing back in the face of adversity” (p. 11). Prince-Embury (2013) further argued that “Block viewed ego resiliency as a meta-level personality trait associated with the conception of ego as a complex integrative mechanism” (p. 11). Huey and Weisz (1997) described Ego Resiliency as “the internal personality structures that function to modulate impulses adaptively” (p. 1). Letzringa, Block, and Funder (2004) noted Block’s characterization of ego-resiliency, which is reported as the ability to temporarily adapt one’s level of control up or down as the situation dictates.

Letzringa et al. (2004) posited:

As a result of this adaptive flexibility, individuals with a high level of resiliency are more likely to experience positive affect, and have higher levels of self-confidence and better psychological adjustment than individuals with a low level of resiliency. (p. 4)

Belsky and Pluess (2013) added to resilience theory with their finding that an individual’s innate responsiveness to environmental conditions will determine how that individual responds to positive and/or negative experiences.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the personality traits and levels of resilience that influence teacher retention within urban school districts. The urban school district is of

particular interest because of the difficulty retaining teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2003). This researcher (2003) asserted that “teacher turnover is 50% higher in high-poverty than in low-poverty schools and new teachers in urban districts exit or transfer at higher rates than their suburban counterparts” (p. 2). Investigating the personality traits and levels of resilience through in-depth interviews of teachers who have been teaching for more than 5 years has major implications on hiring practices in the field of education. Currently, there are many professions that use various forms of testing as a part of their hiring process to determine the best candidate. According to the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (2018), 29% of employers use one or more forms of psychological measurements or assessments. In addition, 13% % of employers use personality tests, 8% use interest inventories, 20% of employers use cognitive ability tests, 68% of employers engage in various forms of job skills testing, and 41% of employees test job applicants in basic literacy and/or math skills.

The need to retain employees has prompted employers to utilize assessments and inventories towards retention. Barrick and Zimmerman (2009) indicated a new path taken by employers in an effort to prevent turnover before employees start their jobs by determining which candidates are more likely to stay with an organization. They conducted a study utilizing the Five Factor Model personality inventory to evaluate the usefulness of several pre-hire variables in predicting voluntary turnover and job performance. According to Barrick and Zimmerman (2009):

The purpose of this study was the need to examine the extent to which employers can reduce turnover and simultaneously increase performance during the selection process by using predictors related to applicants’ propensity to become attached to their organizations. (p. 199)

When looking at voluntary turnover, “the study collected data over a two-year period after applicants were hired and was categorized as having occurred within six months or after this period, up to two years” (p. 190). Barrick and Zimmerman (2009) stated:

After the six-month period and up to two years later, conscientiousness and emotional stability were still related to voluntary, avoidable turnover as expected ... as expected personality was found to be a useful predictor of voluntary, avoidable turnover up to two years after hire. (p. 193)

Moreover, the results indicated that individuals high in neuroticism “were less likely to become effectively socialized into their organizations ... and more likely to experience interpersonal conflict, thereby increasing their stress levels and intentions to quit” (p. 188).

The purpose of this study was to seek a solution to teacher attrition in urban school districts. This study identified personality traits and levels of resilience that are present in teachers within urban school districts who stay in the teaching profession for more than 3 years. The results of this study will provide hiring managers with tools which will allow them to construct better hiring policies and practices and to maximize the recruitment process.

The research and literature reviewed in this chapter was labeled and organized according to the following topics: Teacher Attrition and Retention, Teacher Turnover: Economic Costs of Teacher Turnover, Institutional Costs of Teacher Turnover, The Impact of Teacher Turnover on the Student-Teacher Relationship, and The Impact of Teacher Turnover on Student Achievement; Personality Traits and Levels of Resilience on Teacher Retention.

### **Teacher Retention and Attrition**

Currently, there is a high attrition rate among teachers who are leaving the profession during the early years of a career. According to Aragon (2016), the Education Commission of the United States asserted that “urban, rural, high-poverty, high-minority, and low-achieving



schools face persistent staffing challenges” (p. 5). Studies report various percentages of teachers leaving the profession. One report indicated that “25%-50% of beginning teachers resign during their first three years of teaching” (Inman & Marlow, 2004). Another study indicated that roughly 25% of the teacher workforce has less than 5 years of experience in the field of teaching (Bastian, McCord, Marks, & Carpenter, 2017). An additional study based in New York asserted that 22% of elementary teachers left their school within 1 year of teaching, 46% of elementary teachers left within 3 years of teaching, and 59% of elementary teachers left within 5 years of teaching (Marinell & Coca, 2013). A study that looked at teachers in Kentucky concluded that teachers with 3 or fewer years of teaching experience and teachers with over 20 years of teaching experience left the public school system at higher rates (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Moreover, a study of West Virginia teachers noted that teachers who started teaching in the 2008-2009 school year left the profession within the first 4 years of teaching at a 32% rate (NCES, 2016).

There has been much speculation based on research that the issue may not be teacher recruitment, but rather teacher retention beyond the first 3 to 5 years of teaching.

### **Reasons for Teacher Attrition**

Torres (2011) cited a 9% turnover rate among teachers leaving public schools and a 21% turnover rate among teachers leaving private schools within the first 1 to 3 years of teaching.

According to Scheopner (2010):

In the U.S., private school teachers are more apt to leave teaching than their public school counterparts. This is particularly true in small private schools enrolling fewer than 300 students including Catholic schools, which report the highest turnover rates. Each year, small private schools experience a loss of almost one-quarter of their faculty. (pp. 261-262)

While small private schools had the largest turnover rate, large private schools had the lowest turnover rate (Scheopner, 2010). In addition, it is worth noting that younger teachers are leaving more often than older teachers, and teachers with fewer years of experience are leaving more quickly than those teachers with many years of experience (Torres, 2011).

Torres (2011) indicated that the reasons teachers leave the teaching profession within the early years are connected to various factors including salary, workplace conditions, lack of support from administration, low job satisfaction, inadequate resources, and workload. Likewise, Brill and McCartney (2008) also cited low salaries and lack of support as a major reason for attrition. They added that “rampant student discipline problems” (p. 751) and inner-city placement are major factors as well. “Teachers in schools with minority enrollments of 50 (percent) or more migrate at twice the rate of teachers in schools with relatively few minority students” (p. 754). Brill and McCartney (2008) also stated that “the more impoverished and racially isolated the school, the greater the likelihood that students in the school will be taught by inexperienced teachers, uncertified teachers ... poor teacher retention is exacerbated by impoverished, high minority schools” (p. 754).

Karsenti and Collin (2013) reported that “individual factors such as emotional and psychological characteristics that are incompatible with the teaching profession” (p. 142) are a major factor impacting attrition, as well as sociodemographic and professional factors.

It is important to note that each generation of individuals entering the teaching profession comes into the profession with a different set of values from previous generations. According to Moore-Johnson (2006):

The next generation of teachers make career decisions in a labor context strikingly different from 40 years ago and the interests and opinions of today’s prospective

teachers are unlike those of any teachers who precede them ... Individuals who consider teaching today have many more career options than the retiring generation—many of them with much higher salaries and better working conditions than teaching. (p. 13)

The younger generation of workers is not looking to stay in one career for a lifetime and the younger generation of teachers is more apt to switch careers several times throughout their lifetime. Moore-Johnson and The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers (2006) conducted a study investigating 50 first and second year teachers in Massachusetts; 52% entered teaching as a first career at an average age of 24 and 48% entered teaching at mid-career at an average age of 36. It was discovered that many of the new teachers were tentative about their career choice, and viewed it as one of several careers they expected to have. Only four of the 26 first career entrants and six of the 24 mid-career teachers planned to stay in the classroom until retirement.

Teacher retention and attrition has also been traced back to the hiring process (Cannata et al., 2017; Haberman, 2005). Because urban districts face a unique challenge with teacher retention, taking the time to select an individual who is committed to the organization as a whole is important. Haberman (2005) is an educator and founder of The Haberman Foundation, an organization devoted to developing, researching, refining, and replicating research in the area of teacher and administrator selection. Haberman believed that the focus within urban settings must be on teacher selection (2002), stating that “teacher selection is more important than teacher training in urban settings. Selection is 80% of the matter” (p. 3). Haberman further asserted that college courses, student teaching, and in-service workshops are important and beneficial depending on the type of teacher selected. In addition, selecting teachers based on credentials, GPA, references, and content knowledge testing is not effective when hiring for urban settings

(Haberman, 2005). Thus, taking the time to select an individual who has certain personality traits and is resilient becomes important within an urban district.

Cannata et al. (2017) conducted a study that investigated how the hiring process is changing due to evaluation reforms by interviewing central office personnel and principals from six urban school districts and two charter management organizations. The study found that while nearly all of the candidates submitted traditional information (resumes and references), they did not have to submit more extensive data. Schools and school districts have wide freedom when it comes to the hiring process. Cannata et al. (2017) stated that “evidence suggests that it is a rushed and information poor process, giving principals little information on which to base their decision” (p. 183). In addition, Cannata et al. (2017) asserted many teachers are new teachers and have not accumulated any evidence of their teaching performance, which makes it difficult for principals to effectively hire new teachers. Little to moderate progress has been made in establishing rigorous methods in selecting those who are likely to become successful teachers and to be retainable past the 3-year mark.

Brill and McCartney (2008) found that severe behavior problems are negatively correlated to teacher satisfaction and their desire to continue in the profession. “Exacerbating the problem, many schools assign novice teachers to the most difficult or problematic classrooms, since they lack the seniority to demand better assignments” (p. 756). Likewise, Krasnoff (2014) asserted that “severe behavior problems have been found to be negatively correlated with teacher satisfaction and novice teachers are typically assigned to the most difficult or problematic classrooms” (p. 11). In addition, often the misbehavior of students is not handled in a way that makes a teacher feel validated and supported, which leads teachers to develop resentment towards the school community.

Lentfer and Franks (2015) discussed how managing classroom behaviors is difficult for beginning teachers. They stressed the importance of assisting beginning teachers with tools to manage classrooms in teacher induction programs to help alleviate the high levels of stress that disruptive behaviors cause for novice teachers. They further asserted that “teacher efficacy was negatively impacted by student discipline and classroom management problems, which resulted in high levels of stress and early departures from the teaching profession” (p. 79).

The urban school district is of particular interest because of the difficulty of retaining teachers. Urban areas have the highest attrition rates, with 50% of new teachers leaving within 5 years (Yonezawa et al., 2011). Furthermore, Bacher-Hicks, Papay, Page, and Marinell (2017) stated that “urban school systems in particular struggle to retain teachers” (p. 2). These researchers produced a study which investigated the extent of and variation in the teacher retention challenge across 16 urban public schools in seven states. This study indicated that across districts, 13% to 35% of novices left their district after 1 year, while 44% to 77% left within 5 years. The reasons for the high attrition rates cited in this study included student demographics, low salaries, organizational context, and district policies and practices. Thus, hiring needs to fill one teaching slot are 40% greater from one district to the next due to differences in retention rates (Bacher-Hicks et al., 2017). Haberman (2005) called the teacher shortage in urban schools a phenomenon, as urban districts are likely to need thousands of teachers, yet suburbs and small towns will receive hundreds of applicants for one teaching position.

Krasnoff (2014) indicated that underpaid teachers are usually not supported and underprepared, yet they have to work with fewer resources in poorer working conditions. This makes beginning teachers more vulnerable, as they are more likely to be underpaid and more

likely to work with under-performing students. According to Krasnoff (2014), “the result is that new teachers are the most at risk of leaving the teaching profession” (p. 11). Moreover, Torres (2011) noted that the current wave of new teachers entering the field have more career options that offer higher salaries, better benefits, more respect, and superior working conditions. Johnson (2004) conducted a qualitative study that looked at the role played by salary in teaching. He noted that while many teachers understood that they would not get rich teaching, they did not expect to have to struggle financially. He also noted that math and science teachers are more likely to leave because they can make more money in fields outside of teaching.

The way a teacher perceives his or her daily workplace has a large impact on whether the teacher remains in the building and/or buildings. According to Brill and McCartney (2008), “indoor air quality, control over classroom temperature, natural lighting, and soundproof rooms were identified as factors that dramatically improved the perceived quality of school facilities” (p. 758), which increased job satisfaction, a factor related to attrition/retention. Yost (2006) further expanded on the issue of workplace conditions, indicating that large class sizes, heavy teaching loads, lack of administrative support or other support, and inadequate resources fall under workplace conditions and lend to high rates of attrition. Yost (2006) stated that it is often the novice teachers who receive the worst “workplace conditions,” which also drives attrition. Krasnoff (2014) asserted that “overwhelming workloads and too little planning time are the primary sources of dissatisfaction cited by teachers upon leaving a school or the profession” (p. 11).

Bacher-Hicks et al. (2017) found that teacher retention varies by teacher experience and effectiveness (p. 3). Teachers who did not experience success in the academic setting were more likely to leave the teaching profession (Bacher-Hicks et al., 2017; Feng & Sass, 2012). Bacher-

Hicks et al. (2017) further stated that “departing teachers are often replaced by novice teachers who are substantially less effective than more experienced teachers on average, largely because teachers’ effectiveness improved rapidly in the career” (p. 7).

### **Impact of Teacher Attrition**

As the studies have indicated, high teacher turnover is a challenge facing school districts across the country, especially in the first 5 years of teaching. It is especially important to note that teacher turnover is highest in low achieving, low-income schools with non-white populations. Furthermore, the high teacher turnover rate affects other variables that impact education across the board. Variables such as instructional, institutional, and economic costs; relationships; and student achievement are negatively affected by high teacher turnover.

Teacher attrition impacts the overall budget of the district as well as the school. The costs of training, professional development, coaching, and various other resources are wasted on teachers who choose to leave the profession within the first 3 to 5 years, which in turn impacts students negatively. Nationally, it has been estimated that the cost ranges from 20% to 150% of the salary of the teacher leaving the profession. The recruiting, hiring, and training process for new teachers involves annual spending of \$2.2 billion to \$4.9 billion (Brill & McCartney, 2008). Moreover, Felsher, Guglielmino, Shockley, and Watlington (2010) cited a study by the National Committee on Teaching and America’s Future (NCTAF, 2007) which conducted a pilot study on five districts to look at the cost of teacher turnover. According to Felsher et al. (2010):

The Cost of Teacher Turnover study found that in the suburban countywide district of Granville County, North Carolina, the teacher turnover cost was almost \$10,000 per teacher. In the urban school district of Milwaukee, the average cost to replace a teacher was \$15,325 and in the very large urban districts, such as Chicago, costs varied from \$15,835 to \$26,502 per teacher. (p. 32)

Budgets throughout America are impacted by the high costs associated with teacher attrition. Retaining teachers in whom the districts across America have already invested both time and money is paramount to the overall success of the educational system (Felsher et al., 2010).

Teacher attrition impacts the school community. Teachers leaving within the first 3 to 5 years of teaching create low morale, not only in the field of education itself but also in the schools that teachers are exiting. “With high rates of turnover, the community is disrupted and so is the team-based organizational structure and functioning of a school” (Brill & McCartney, 2008, p. 752). The disruption of the community causes a strain on the system that is difficult to rectify. Brill and McCartney (2008) further stated:

Constant changes in the staff interrupt the planning and implementation of a coherent, comprehensive, and unified curriculum. It may also put a strain on working relationships, and teachers complain of having to spend time helping their new coworkers adjust to the environment instead of spending time with their own students. High turnover rates can erode trust between staff members and between the family and the school as new teachers are constantly brought into the work team. (p. 753)

Ronfeldt et al. (2012) likewise cited the alteration of relationships and relational patterns when teachers leave schools, which has a negative effect on faculty interactions and the climate of the school. Hanselman et al. (2011) stated that there is a disruptive effect that takes place on the development and maintenance of social resources when high levels of teacher turnover take place. Ronfeldt et al. (2012) asserted that “where turnover is considered to have a disruptive



organizational influence, all members of a school community are vulnerable, including staying teachers and their students” (p. 4).

The attrition of teachers has a direct impact on the number of inexperienced teachers in classrooms delivering instruction to students. Kini and Podolski (2016) stated that “novice teachers are less likely to get student gains than experienced teachers” (p. 2). Kini and Podolsky (2016) conducted a study which showed a positive relationship between teaching experience and gains in a teacher’s effectiveness in improving student outcomes. This study concluded that “teachers become better able to support student learning as they gain experience and that gains from experience continue well into the second and often third decades of their career” (p. 21). However, data asserts that first year teachers are the largest experience category, with roughly 25% of the teacher workforce having fewer than 5 years of teaching experience (Bastian et al., 2017).

The Schools and Staffing Survey (2011-2012) reported that students were 50% more likely to have a teacher with fewer than 4 years of experience in the highest poverty schools than in the lowest poverty schools. Moreover, the Civil Rights Data Collection (2009-2010) sampled 7,000 school districts and found that schools serving mostly African American students are twice as likely to have teachers with 1 or 2 years of experience, which suggests that the least experienced teachers are concentrated in low income, high minority schools. In addition, the Civil Rights Data Collection (2012-2013) reported that Black, Latino, American Indian, and Native Alaskan students are three to four times more likely to attend schools with more first year teachers than their white counterparts. These alarming data trends speak to the importance of retaining teachers past the 3- to 5-year mark, particularly within urban school settings.

Lankford, Loeb, Ronfeldt, and Wyckoff (2011) investigated the impact of teacher turnover on student achievement in a study entitled “How Teacher Turnover Harms Student Achievement.” Lankford et al. (2011) explored the relationship between teacher turnover and student achievement in Math and ELA. According to Lankford et al. (2011):

This study draws on extensive administrative data from the New York City Department of Education and the New York State Education Department. Analyses focus on approximately 625,000 observations of 4th and 5th grade students across all New York City elementary schools over 5 academic years (2000-2002; 2004-2007). We were able to link student test scores in math and ELA to student, class, school, and teacher characteristics. (pp. 3-4)

This study used regression analysis to analyze the data. According to Lankford et al. (2011), “results demonstrate that teacher turnover has a significant and negative effect on student achievement in both math and ELA. Moreover, teacher turnover is particularly harmful to students in schools with large populations of low-performing and black students” (p. 17).

Clotfelter, Ladd, and Vigdor (2007) confirmed the impact of teacher experience on student achievement in a longitudinal analysis study of teacher credentials and student achievement entitled “Teacher Credentials and Student Achievement: Longitudinal Analysis with Student Fixed Effects.” Clotfelter et al. (2007) discovered that in North Carolina, elementary grade teachers who had taught between 3 and 5 years added 9% and 6% of a standard deviation (SD) to student achievement on end-of-grade exams in mathematics and reading. Clotfelter et al. (2010) followed this study with another study entitled “Teacher Credentials and Student Achievement in High School: A Cross-Subject Analysis with Student Fixed Effects,” which determined that teachers who have more experience teaching were more effective than

those teachers who had less experience teaching students. The two studies focused on elementary and secondary school settings, which ruled out possible differences between the lower grades and higher grades.

### **Teacher Retention**

This section of the literature review focuses on the research related to teacher retention, including resiliency as described by ego resiliency, grit, and personality traits of conscientiousness and emotional stability, which are two of the five traits of the Five Factor Model.

### **Resiliency**

Resilience is defined as a mode of interacting with events in the environment that is activated and nurtured in times of stress. It is the human capacity to face, overcome, and even be strengthened by experiences of adversity (Tait, 2008). Resilience is an important character trait to possess in general, and even more so when working and dealing with a diverse set of working conditions and individuals, both young and adult alike. According to Yost (2006), individuals who encompass traits of resiliency and persistence are people who can quickly recover and regroup to stay the course when faced with challenges. In addition, Alessandri, Vecchione, Caprara, and Letzringa (2012) stated:

Resilient individuals (i.e., individuals high in ego-resiliency) show better adjustment and higher personal attainments at all stages of life ... treating resilience as a trait accounts for significant individual differences in the capacity to adapt in the face of trauma and stress. Within this framework, ego-resiliency is expected to reflect individual differences that may be present as early as birth. (p.

1)

Yost (2006) asserted that “studies on teacher retention demonstrate that some teachers are both resilient and persistent, remaining in the profession despite being confronted with the same challenges and obstacles of those who leave” (p. 59). Keogh, Garvis, and Pendergast (2010) further stated that there are not many studies on teacher retention that examine resilience among new teachers in their beginning and middle years. Understanding the level of resilience present in those teachers within the range of 3 to 5 years of teaching is critical to understanding teacher retention. Keogh et al. (2010) claimed that resilience can be taught to novice teachers and that helping teachers build resilience skills may counteract the high rates of attrition.

## **Grit**

Grit is defined as the ability to maintain consistency of interests and goals over time (Robertson-Kraft & Duckworth, 2015). Robertson-Kraft and Duckworth (2015) identified the difference between grit and resilience as follows: while resilience is seen as the ability to adapt and quickly recover, grit is noted for its “consistency of interests and goals over time” (p. 5). Robertson-Kraft and Duckworth stated that “likewise, grit can be distinguished from conscientiousness, a multi-dimensional family of personality traits that encompasses perseverance but also includes tendencies toward responsibility, self-control, orderliness, and traditionalism” (p. 6). Robertson-Kraft and Duckworth went on to assert that “grittier teachers outperformed their less gritty colleagues and were less likely to leave their classrooms mid-year” (p. 1). Likewise, Duckworth et al. (2009) argued that “grittier individuals work harder and longer in very challenging settings than did their less gritty peers; sustained effort despite adversity” (p. 544).

Robertson-Kraft and Duckworth (2015) conducted a study that examined whether teacher retention and effectiveness among novice teachers in their first and second years of teaching can be predicted by differences in grit. They collected biographical data from two samples of novice

teachers in low income schools. Teacher resumes were coded on a 7-point scale based on objective evidence of perseverance and passion in college activities and work experience. Those scores were used to predict teacher retention through the academic year. Robertson-Kraft and Duckworth (2015) stated:

We compared the predictive validity of grit scores to that of other variables available at the time of hire, including academic credentials, such as college GPA, interviewer ratings of leadership experience, and demographic variables. Our results indicate that grittier teachers were more likely to complete the school year and also outperformed their less gritty colleagues. (p. 2)

The points assigned were based on level of involvement in activities ranging from leadership activities to work experiences. The highest scores were given to individuals who ran organizations or reached the highest honor within an activity or work experience. A binary logistic regression model was used to assess incremental predictive validity for grit for retention. The results indicated that “when controlling for leadership, teachers who were one standard deviation higher in grit were more than twice as likely to be retained over the course of the year than their less gritty peers ... Leadership ratings in this model were not predictive of retention” (Robertson-Kraft & Duckworth, 2015, p. 10).

As a result of the study, Robertson-Kraft and Duckworth (2015) suggested adding grit as a measure to consider when hiring new candidates for teaching. They stated that “while no single factor in isolation should determine a hiring decision, the method for quantifying grit from biographical data developed for this investigation represents a practical tool for predicting success in the first few years in teaching” (p. 10).

## **Personality Traits**

The necessity of retaining teachers in the teaching field forces one not only to consider how to retain teachers but also to investigate the traits inherent in teachers who stay despite the variables that cause the high attrition rates. Bastian et al. (2017) asserted that “seminal research in psychology and economics highlights the importance of personality traits and personal qualities to individual’s academic, workplace, and livelihood outcomes” (p. 2). Additionally, Bastian et al. (2017) found that self-discipline among middle school children was a more accurate predictor of the students’ grade point averages than intelligence test scores.

Bastian et al. also found that “measures of childhood self-control significantly predict physical health, substance dependence, personal finances, and criminal outcomes for adults” (p. 2). Building on this, Bastian et al. (2017) posited the importance of teacher personality traits in connection to increased performance and retention outcomes, information which could be obtained through the hiring process. Likewise, Barrick (2009) indicated that “two five factor model traits, conscientiousness and emotional stability, were valid predictors of performance in all, or nearly all jobs. Hence these two traits should be correlated with job performance, as well as retention, with voluntary avoidable turnover” (p. 188).

The Education Policy Initiative at Carolina (EPIC) (2015) conducted a study that found that first year teachers with higher levels of openness to experience were more likely to work in school settings that were high-poverty, low performing, high-minority, and high-need. In addition, the study noted that high levels of conscientiousness among first year teachers significantly predicted teacher value-added, teacher evaluation ratings, and teacher persistence as it pertains to teacher retention. As a result of the study, EPIC indicated the need for schools to start using personality trait measures as a way to improve their hiring decisions. Two major conclusions came as a result of the study: “Personality traits should be one of a number of valid

indicators that inform admissions into teacher preparation programs and hiring decisions;” and “consequential decisions are improved when measures significantly predict multiple outcomes of interest” (p. 6).

### **Impact of Personality Traits on Teacher Retention**

Zimmerman (2008) cited the importance to an organization in relation to retention of selecting individuals high in conscientiousness, extraversion, and emotional stability.

Zimmerman (2008) stated that “conscientiousness likely influences the contractual and moral/ethical motivational forces that affect turnover” (p. 313). Moreover, Zimmerman (2008) noted that low emotional stability had a negative impact on job retention because the individual was more likely to have negative perceptions of himself or herself and the environment. Bastian et al. (2017) indicated that emotional stability and conscientiousness are positively associated with job retention, noting that conscientiousness is one of the best predictors of job performance. Garvis et al. (2010) examined the resilience of novice teachers during their early years, asserting the value of resilience in teacher retention.

In a study of personality traits of beginning teacher performance and retention entitled “A Temperament for Teaching? Associations Between Personality Traits and Beginning Teacher Performance and Retention,” Bastian et al. (2017) assessed the associations between personality traits and the performance and retention outcomes among first year teachers in North Carolina public schools using 1,790 first year teachers with diverse forms of teacher preparation and academic ability utilizing an online survey platform. Three teacher outcome measures (teacher value-added scores, teacher evaluation ratings, and teacher retention) were included in the study.

The outcome measure that examined teacher retention looked at whether the personality traits of first year teachers were significantly associated with their return to North Carolina public schools in the 2014-2015 school year. Salary data was utilized to track teacher retention

and a dichotomous variable was created where a value of 1 was assigned for returning teachers and a value of 0 was assigned for those individuals exiting the teaching profession. In assessing the relationship between personality traits and teacher retention, Bastian et al. (2017) explained:

For these analyses, we specified a logistic regression model with a set of school covariates and standard errors clustered at the school level. Coefficients from these models indicate how a 1-SD increase in a personality trait—one of the Big Five domains or facets—predicts the odds of returning to teach in North Carolina public schools in the 2014-2015 school year. (p. 8)

The study found one of the Big Five personality traits, conscientiousness, to be statistically significant. Bastian et al. (2017) stated that “conscientiousness incorporates traits related to dependability, such as being thorough, responsible, confirming, careful, and planful, as well as a set of characteristics related to motivation, including drive and persistence” (p. 11). Moreover, the study affirmed that conscientiousness was significantly associated with higher teacher value-added estimates, higher teacher evaluation ratings across all five professional teaching standards, and higher rates of teacher retention in North Carolina public schools. As it related to teacher retention, it should be noted that a 1-SD increase in conscientiousness was associated with a 2.5 percentage point increase in teacher retention. “With 86.5% of first year teachers returning to North Carolina public schools in 2014-2015, this conscientiousness result represents a 20% increase in retention” (p. 11).

There has been increasing interest in tools to measure personality traits, which can be used to ascertain whether a potential employee is a good fit for a company. Corporations and other employment structures have been using personality tests for years; however, educational institutions generally have not used these tools in hiring practices. Bastian et al. (2017) asserted



the need to integrate personality trait measures into hiring practices. They argued that personality testing should be one of several valid indicators used to inform hiring decisions. In addition, Zimmerman (2008) asserted that during the selection process to hire individuals, personality tests should be utilized to ascertain which individuals are less likely to leave an organization. Zimmerman (2008) further stated that “because 2 of the Five Factor Model traits (conscientiousness and emotional stability) found to predict turnover have also been found to predict performance, the utility of selecting on these traits is amplified” (p. 335).

### **Summary**

Teacher attrition rates are high among teachers working in urban school districts (Darling-Hammond, 2003). The National Center for Educational Statistics reported that nearly 50% of newly hired teachers leave the teaching profession within 5 years. Darling-Hammond (2003) asserted that teacher turnover was 50% higher in high-poverty than in low poverty schools, and new teachers in urban districts exit or transfer at higher rates than their suburban counterparts (p. 2). Previous research identified several factors for the high rates of teacher attrition, including student behavior, low salary, workplace conditions, and generational mind shift (Brill & McCartney, 2008; Krasnoff, 2014; Torres, 2011).

The extant literature has shown that two of the five personality traits of the Five Factor Model and resilience are present in teachers who stay in the teaching profession for more than 3 years. Identifying these personality traits and resilience traits through interviews that support sustainability could be utilized in hiring practices in urban school districts.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

Research in educational leadership has dived deeply into teacher attrition and teacher retention. While there is much literature on what makes a teacher leave the teaching profession and what makes a teacher stay in the teaching profession, there is not much literature on what type of teacher is more likely to stay or to leave the profession of teaching (Bacher-Hicks et al., 2017; Carve-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Greenfield, 2015; Howard, 2008; Loeb et al., 2010; McCartney & Brill, 2008; McLauren et al., 2009; Yonezawa et al., 2011).

There is a separate body of literature focused specifically on the teaching experience within inner city schools and how the challenges inherent in those schools have created a teacher shortage which has had a detrimental impact on student outcomes and teacher support (Clotfelter et al., 2010; Hughes, 2014; Jacobs, 2007; Loeb et al., 2011). However, neither of these bodies of literature focused on the type of teacher who is more likely to stay in teaching, with a narrowed focus on inner city teachers. Because of the extreme teacher shortage within inner city school districts, identifying the personality characteristics of inner city teachers which make them more likely to stay in the teaching profession can potentially improve teacher retention through changes in hiring practices. The proposed hiring practices can include adding questions which look at personality or including a personality inventory to measure personality as a part of the hiring practice.

This study sought to use a case study design to explore the phenomenon of teacher turnover within urban school districts by looking closely at one urban school district in northern New Jersey and the teachers who have remained with the district for 5 or more years. Additionally, this study sought to identify the characteristics and resilience levels present in these employees.

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to investigate the influence of personality traits and resilience on teacher retention in an urban school district. There is limited qualitative research on the influence of personality traits and resilience on teacher retention in urban school settings. This study adds to the existing literature by providing administrators and human resource personnel with additional questions to incorporate into their hiring practices in order to discern among teaching candidates who will be more likely to remain in a highly stressful setting common within urban school districts and those who may not.

### **Research Questions**

The central question guiding this study was: What influence, if any, do personality traits and levels of resilience have on teachers within urban school districts who remain in the teaching profession for more than 3 years?

Research Question 1: What was the influence, if any, of personality traits on teacher retention in an urban school district?

Research Question 2: What was the influence, if any, of resilience on teacher retention in an urban school district?

Research Question 3: To what extent, if any, did participants believe they were resilient?

Research Question 4: To what extent, if any, did personality traits influence resilience?

### **Research Design**

The research design provides the framework for the collection and analysis of data and can either be quantitative or qualitative. The quantitative design employs precise measurement using numbers and accuracy to examine phenomena, whereas the qualitative design is used when there is a lack of understanding and a need to thoroughly examine a problem (Ngozwana, 2018; Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). Additionally, a qualitative design is used when seeking to understand a social phenomenon through the use of an in-depth, holistic approach that produces

rich, telling narratives (Ngozwana, 2018; Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). For the purpose of this study, a qualitative design was more useful because the interview was the primary source of data. The researcher used a qualitative research design for the thorough examination of the influence of personality traits and resiliency on teacher retention in an urban school district. The researcher chose a qualitative design because it allowed for an in-depth understanding of what makes a teacher continue teaching within the urban school setting despite the extreme challenges she/he may face.

A case study design was selected because the researcher wanted to conduct a close examination to explore a phenomenon within an organization (Ngozwana, 2018). The researcher used the case study to help develop or refine her theory and to investigate and analyze a collective case that could be used to penetrate the situation in ways that are not always susceptible to numerical analysis (Cohen, 2007; Crowe et al., 2011; Hyatt et al., 2014).

While there are certain weaknesses of a case study (results may not be generalizable, the study may not be easily open to cross-checking, the study can be prone to problems of observer bias), there are unique strengths that make them valuable (Cohen, 2007). There are three types of case studies utilized in research: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. Intrinsic case studies are utilized to gain knowledge about a unique phenomenon, instrumental case studies utilize a specific case to obtain a wider appreciation of an issue or phenomenon, and collective case studies encompasses the study of multiple cases at the same time or sequentially with the goal of generating an even broader appreciation of a particular issue (Crowe et al., 2011). For this study, the researcher utilized the intrinsic type.

### **Sample Selection**

The sample for this study was taken from an urban city within a northern New Jersey district recently granted local control after having been under state control for 22 years. The

district has a population size of 281,764 according to the 2016 American Community Survey 5-year population estimate, which makes it the 70th largest city in the United States. According to the 2010 census, the selected inner city is comprised of 26.31% white, 52.35% African American, 0.61% Native American, 1.62% Asian, 0.04% Pacific Islander, 33.83% Hispanic or Latino, 15.22% Other Races, and 3.85% 2 or more races. The per capita income for the city was \$17,367. Roughly 22.0% of families and 25.0% of the population were below the poverty line, including 34.9% of those under age 18. One third of the city's population was impoverished and 25.6% of the population is under the age of 18 (United States Census Bureau, 2010).

There are 64 traditional schools in the school district with a student population of roughly 35,835, making it the largest as well as one of the oldest school systems in New Jersey. The district serves 15,877 African American students, 2,841 Caucasian students, 16,628 Hispanic students, 294 Asian students, 67 Native American students, and 126 Pacific Islander students. There are 18,249 male students and 17,080 female students. According to the district website, it serves more students than any other district in New Jersey and has twice as many schools as 99% of districts in New Jersey. In addition, the district serves more black and Hispanic students and serves more students from low income families than all other districts in New Jersey. Moreover, the district reported that it serves a higher proportion of students with a Limited English Proficient classification than 93% of districts in New Jersey.

While there are more than 64 schools which operate within the inner city, there are only 64 schools which fall under the umbrella of the public school district studied in this research. The sample was limited to the public school teachers operating within the 64 schools of the inner city school district. All of the teachers who were selected had a minimum of a bachelor's degree and had a standard teaching certification in the subject they presently teach.

In order for the study to be trustworthy in qualitative research, a valid sample had to be considered (Wilson, 2014). The researcher used the non-probability method of sampling based on her judgment in selecting participants that were accessible and available (Setia, 2016). The researcher utilized purposeful sampling to obtain the primary participants, seeking information-rich individuals to discover a complete range of perceptions which allowed her to meet the purpose of the research study (Ellis, 2001; Griffith et al., 2016, p. 2).

Qualitative researchers rarely determine their sample size prior to their study; instead, they select their cases gradually and do not finish selecting until their data reaches saturation (Ishak & Abu Baker, 2014). Thus the researcher sought to use up to 20 participants in confidential one-on-one interviews of approximately 45 minutes. While there are no rules for sample size, data collection and analysis should continue until no new codes or concepts emerge from the sample and all relevant information that is needed to gain complete insight into the topic has been found (Rijnsoever, 2017).

## **Participants**

Because the study used humans, the researcher reported on ethical considerations, as it is considered critical in research, particularly when using human subjects.

(<https://cirt.gcu.edu/research/developmentresources/tutorials/ethics>). For this reason, the researcher submitted all necessary detailed information to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to data collection. Any mandated changes to the research study were implemented prior to the recruitment process. Once approval for this research study was obtained, the researcher began the process of recruiting participants by searching the district's website, where teacher retention information is cataloged by school. The website lists the percentages of teachers who have taught at each school in the district for more than 3 years. The researcher identified k-12 schools with teacher retention rates at 40% and more and obtained those teachers' email

addresses. A letter of solicitation (see Appendix B) was sent by email describing the nature of the study; voluntary participation; how the data was to be collected, secured, and stored; and department approval to those teachers. Additionally, volunteers were notified that the study would preserve their anonymity and give them the option to change their mind about participation. The researcher also emailed the principals and supervisors at the schools of interest explaining the study and its purpose in order to gain their support and assistance in recruiting teachers. The researcher created a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix C) to obtain preliminary information including years of service in the field of teaching, educational and professional history, certifications, and subjects taught.

Informed consent (see Appendix A) was obtained to gain participation in the study and included the following, as recommended by Connelly (2014): purpose of research, what the participants would be doing and for how long, offer to withdraw at any time for any reason, potential benefits/harm to participants and/or society, how privacy would be protected, instructions for how to obtain a copy of the results, the researcher's identity and contact information. The participants signed the consent form to indicate comprehension of their rights and give their permission to participate in the study. A copy of the consent form was given to each participant and a copy kept on file with the researcher.

Twenty teachers volunteered to participate in this study. Their pseudonyms, genders, current assignments, years of teaching experience, and grade levels taught are presented in Table 3.

Table 3.  
*Demographic Data of Participants*

<b>Participant Pseudonym/ Gender</b>	<b>Grade Level Taught</b>	<b>Years in Urban Education</b>	<b>Years in Current Building</b>	<b>Subject Taught</b>
Billy (M)	11,12	14	5	Math
Amy (F)	7,8	16	5	Math/Science
Tony (M)	9,10,11,12	25	25	AP Lit, English
Dena (F)	5	8	7	ELA
Paula (F)	11,12	17	17	Special Ed., English
Ruby (F)	2	27	27	All content areas
Lena (F)	9-12	16	7	Special Ed., Math
Michelle (F)	9-12	21	5	English
Melissa (F)	12	23	20	Math
Robert (M)	12	12	12	English
David (M)	10,11	11	9	Spanish
Cliff (M)	8	24	10	Math/Science
Sherry (F)	10	5	5	Biology
Maurice (M)	12	15	1	A & P
Tanya (F)	5	16	13	Lang Arts, Social Studies
Dawn (F)	Mixed	10	5	Special Ed.
Trina (F)	2,3	25	1	Literacy
Kathy (F)	Middle	18	11	Lang Arts/English
Judy (F)	K-8	25	10	Social Studies
Sharon (F)	4	25	15	Social Studies

All participants had taught in urban education from 5 to 25 years and worked in elementary, middle, and high schools. Ten of the 20 participants had been teaching in the urban district for ten or more years. Ten of the 20 participants taught in high schools, 3 in middle schools, and 7 in elementary schools. Six participants of the 20 participants were male and 14 were female. All taught in their areas of teacher certification. Eight participants entered the teaching profession through an alternate route program and the remainder entered through a traditional teacher education program.



## **Data Collection**

Data collection in qualitative research is unstructured and flexible, where decisions are made as the work progresses (Moser & Korsteins, 2018). The researcher was the sole interviewer for data collection as the data for this study was retrieved from semi-structured interviews. The literature review of the Ego Resiliency Scale (E89R) and the Five Factor Model provided the foundation for creating interview questions focused on the specific areas of conscientiousness and resilience. The interviews took place at an offsite setting separate from the school building. The researcher utilized currently rented personal office space located in an office building. Participants were provided with off-street parking and were given directions to the office. Because the setting was a private office, their anonymity was protected at all times. The participants were provided with meeting times based on their availability.

## **Interviews**

A semi-structured one-on-one interview was conducted with each participant utilizing six open-ended questions (see Appendix D) during a 45-minute interview. The questions were pre-tested by three educational experts who were not a part of the study, and revisions to the questions were made based on their feedback. The researcher eliminated her influence when writing the interview questions, developing them based on the information obtained from the literature review and this study's research questions. Interview questions created were clear, fairly short, and conversational in tone, leaving room for participants to elaborate further based upon any follow-up questions asked (Bolderston, 2012; Kuzmanic, 2009). The researcher developed an interview protocol which included a description of the research questions, names of the personnel involved in the study, interview questions to be asked, follow-up probes to help participants expand on their answers, interview process, and cues for preamble discussing confidentiality issues and consent with the participant (Bolderston, 2012). The interviews were

anonymous and pseudonyms were used to identify participants, their schools, and the school district. Following the completion of the interview process, the interviews were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriptionist.

### **Field Notes**

The researcher used field notes to provide rich descriptions of the interview encounters and document contextual data which was useful in understanding the meaning of participant responses (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). Field notes were recorded notes immediately following the interview and during the interview process. Based on the recommendations of Phillippi and Lauderdale (2018), the researcher included the following information in the field notes:

**Basic Information:** Title of the study, principal investigator, dates of data collection, and season of data collection.

**Geographic Setting:** Information about the location of the study.

**Demographics:** Context about the community.

**Societal Pressures:** Tensions which may be hard to determine but which when discovered will be included in the study.

**Setting:** Interview location; i.e., description of the room, location, and participant location in comparison to interviewer location.

**Participants:** Overall appearance and demeanor of participants, noting any baseline nonverbal behaviors.

**Relevant Features:** Relevant items or individuals who may be present during the interview.

**Interview Questions:** Each question was reviewed individually noting any pertinent behaviors not captured by recording or previous notes.

For this study, the researcher created a key to devise a notation system that highlighted when commentary or nonverbal content was added. The field notes were kept as a separate document linked with the interview data by use of the date and/or participant pseudonym. The field notes were stored with the data and protected from disclosure in the same manner as the interview audiotapes and transcripts.

### **Data Storage**

For data storage the researcher developed an efficient system to appropriately manage the consistent manner in which data was collected and recorded, securely stored, cleaned and transferred, presented, and made accessible for verification and use by others (Peersman, 2014). Ensuring data storage utilizing secure processes, the researcher obtained permission from the interviewees and stored the interview audio recordings in a separate folder in which each interview was assigned an identifying code. A digital recorder was used to record all interviews and a digital voice recording application was used as a backup. All of this data was stored on a flash drive in a locked file cabinet in a room to which only the researcher has access for the next 3 years. At the end of 3 years, the researcher will dispose of the data.

### **Data Analysis**

Qualitative data analysis is ultimately about uncovering patterns, concepts, insights, understandings, and emerging themes ([https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/43144\\_12.pdf](https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/43144_12.pdf)). To better understand the data, the researcher immersed herself in the data and familiarized herself with the data by using an approach called immersion, reading and rereading the transcripts carefully to search for deeper understandings of the material (Moser & Korsteins, 2018; Taber, 2013). In addition, the researcher used two of the four approaches described by Taber (2013), immersion and editing, to analyze the data.

The researcher used three steps in analyzing data as a guidepost (Gay et al., 2009). The researcher read and wrote memos about the field notes, transcripts, and observer comments to get an initial sense of the data. Because the data was new, the researcher wrote notes in margins and underlined sections on issues deemed important to develop a sense of her initial thoughts on the data. The researcher also began searching for themes or common threads. She used describing to describe the research process, thereby developing thorough and comprehensive descriptions of the participants, the setting, and the phenomenon. Descriptions were based on collected observations, interview data, field notes, and artifacts (Gay et al., 2009).

Classifying the data included a coding system to break down the data into smaller units to determine their importance by categorizing the data according to connections and common themes (Clark & Veale, 2018; Gay et al., 2009). After transcribing the interviews, the researcher created a code book using inductive open coding to categorize the code data, which was updated throughout the process. First cycle coding was used initially to detect recurring patterns using several approaches. The first approach used was in vivo coding using words or short phrases from the participants' own language (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014) to describe the teaching experience in the urban setting. The researcher placed these codes in quotation marks to distinguish the speech as original language from the participants (Miles et al., 2014). In addition, the researcher used descriptive coding to describe social environments pertinent within inner city neighborhoods and emotion coding as a way to identify participant insights; relationships to students, staff, and community; and their own emotions. Lastly, the researcher used values coding to reflect the participants' beliefs, particularly as related to their traits and levels of resilience.

After developing the first cycle of codes, the researcher created a second cycle of codes using a pattern coding method as a way of grouping segments of data into a smaller number of code categories to identify emerging themes; relationships among people, community, and/or environment; causes/explanations for teacher retention; and theoretical constructs for personality traits and resilience (Miles et al., 2014).

The researcher completed a cross-case analysis using a variable-oriented approach to enhance transferability and achieve a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study (Miles et al., 2014). The researcher created case-level matrices to find commonalities and patterns among participants. In addition, the researcher created a summary table of the findings with three columns for delineation to connect the interview questions to the emergent themes, relationships, causes, and theoretical constructs from the second cycle of coding. The first column introduced the theme, the second column defined the theme, and the final column provided documentation of the evidence from the data to support the theme. The researcher used the explanatory effects matrix to identify emerging threads of causation and relationships, and to make contrasts and comparisons, scanning across rows to get a sense of each participant's storyline and scanning down columns for patterns or themes (Miles et al., 2014).

The researcher finished the analysis by creating a content-analytic summary table to bring together all related and pertinent data into a single format (Miles et al., 2014). Findings were analyzed to ensure that the research questions were fully answered.

### **Role of the Researcher**

I began my career in education in 1996, as a school social worker on the child study team. As much of my work focused on students with disabilities, I found myself working closely with teachers and their needs. Teachers naturally sought me out to talk about their own challenges, so I have spent many educational hours helping teachers to process their work and

personal stressors and emotional issues. The reason I worked so hard helping teachers is that I discovered early in my career that the more emotionally healthy the teacher, the better the outcome for students. This began my intense interest in teachers and their role in the educational process.

When I first began working, I was employed at one of the first alternative schools in education. Alternative Education was just starting its emergence in the world of education. The school where I worked was in an inner city and the students attended from 1:00pm to 8:00pm. The teachers who worked in that setting were quite unique and resilient, for the students who attended were both academically and behaviorally challenged. Despite the uniqueness and resilience of the teachers, there was high teacher turnover. After leaving Alternative Education, I took a job in a suburban setting with high parental involvement, high teacher retention, and high student accountability.

I worked in the suburban setting for 10 years, and worked with many teachers who sought out support. Although I was in a different setting, I saw the same themes emerge among teachers. The more emotionally healthy the teacher was, the better the outcome for students. While working in that particular setting, I also began to pay attention to the different types of teachers present in the building. At that time, I started categorizing teachers according to the type of student they themselves were in high school. The categorization of the teacher determined how I related and connected to them. I found this to be highly successful and was able to shift them in a way that benefited my students.

After leaving the suburban school district, I chose to work in an inner city. Looking for a change and desiring to be a change agent for impoverished students, I found myself immersed in inner city education. I was in a completely different culture with different teacher mindsets.

During my 12 years in urban education, I worked in several school buildings where teacher turnover was extremely high, teachers were working in positions outside of their certification areas, hallways were more crowded than the classrooms, and violence, absenteeism, poverty, and hopelessness were high. I saw teachers as well as students struggling to get through the school day. Moreover, I also worked within magnet schools within the same district and found a culture of high academic achievement, quiet hallways, much higher teacher retention, less absenteeism and violence, and more hopefulness.

I began to question much about urban education, but found myself with a high interest in the functionality of the teacher amidst chaotic systems and structures. I questioned what made a teacher stay within this type of environment. I also found it interesting that teachers did not seek me out for emotional support as they had in my previous district. Although I felt that they needed a higher level of support, teachers did not access me. As I moved into leadership roles throughout the district, I continued to take a strong interest in teachers, particularly the teachers who stayed with the district. What made them stay and how could we leverage the skills and/or attributes that they possessed to help other teachers who were entering the district and leaving just as quickly?

Currently, I work as an administrator in a working-class community, where the district was once considered suburban. The teacher retention rate is high and there is a strong focus on student achievement.

Bias is difficult to avoid completely, and when attempting to eliminate one type of bias, another may be introduced as a result (Malone et al., 2014). One research bias that is inherent in the study is that I was an employee of the inner-city school district where I did my research, supervising many different teachers and working with schools on compliance, instruction,

culture, and climate. I may have had some knowledge of some of the teachers participating in the study. Because I have worked in such a setting, I may have had inherent biases that I may have unconsciously inherited due to firsthand experience and knowledge about the challenges and obstacles facing inner-city educators. To guard against researcher bias, I used triangulation of data, reviewed my findings with peers, used multiple people to code the data, and had the participants review their results.

### **Validity and Reliability of the Data**

To ensure that the research study met the four aspects cited by the Center for Innovation in Research and Teaching, crucial for establishing validity and reliability, I utilized an accumulation of rich data collection, peer debriefing, case reflection, and triangulation. I achieved validity through my diligence in keeping accurate records, field notes, personal memos, transcripts, and a coding book, which helped to establish credibility. Credibility was provided by the trustworthiness and the believability of the findings. To ensure transferability, I included a description of the context of the research to assist in the appropriate generalization of the findings. To ensure dependability, I documented all aspects of the research including any changes or unexpected occurrences to further explain my findings. I also relied on peer review, and worked with the participants to review their answers in order to ensure their confidence in the research. To ensure confirmability, I utilized critical reflexivity, triangulation, and peer review and debriefing.

[https://cirt.gcu.edu/research/developmentresources/research\\_ready/qualitative/validityNeed](https://cirt.gcu.edu/research/developmentresources/research_ready/qualitative/validityNeed)

### **Limitations**

The findings that developed as a result of this study were limited to teachers within an urban school district. The study only included teachers who had been teaching more than 5 years. Therefore, new teachers were not included in this study. This study was in no way



intended to reflect or represent the experiences of teachers in suburban and/or rural school districts, as their experiences may be different.

### **Summary**

Interviews with up to 20 teachers in a New Jersey urban school district provided data for a qualitative analysis of the influence of resiliency and personality characteristics on teacher retention in an urban school district. The research design and purposive sampling of participants provided a comparative analysis of resilience and personality characteristics, and which has a greater impact (if any) on teacher retention in urban schools. Finally, the study examined how this data can be utilized to promote teacher retention in urban school districts across the United States.

## **Chapter 4: Research Findings**

This chapter presents the most pivotal themes and patterns found in analysis of the interviews conducted with 20 teachers in an urban school district concerning their reasons and motivations for continuing to teach in an urban setting. Prior to the interview, trait definitions were presented to the participants. The participants' experiences shed light on the reasons they remained in urban education and how their personalities impacted their decisions to continue teaching in urban education. The examination of this study provides for rich discussion to give a clear representation of what was found and build a connection between the research questions and the findings of this case study.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore personality traits and levels of resilience that are present in teachers within urban school districts who stay in the teaching profession for more than 3 years to investigate whether patterns could be defined.

### **Research Questions**

Research Question 1: What was the influence, if any, of personality traits on teacher retention in an urban school district?

Research Question 2: What was the influence, if any, of resilience on teacher retention in an urban school district?

Research Question 3: To what extent, if any, did participants believe they were resilient?

Research Question 4: To what extent, if any, did personality traits influence resilience?

### **Participant Profiles**

Twenty teachers volunteered to participate in this study. All participants taught in urban education between 5 and 25 years and worked in elementary, middle, and high schools. Six of the 20 participants were male and 14 were female. All were teaching in their areas of teacher

certification. Eight participants entered the teaching profession through an alternate route program and the remainder entered through a traditional teacher education program.

### **Data**

Data were collected and analyzed to understand the influence of personality traits and resilience on teacher retention in an urban school district. A self-rating scale and interview questions were utilized to collect data. Data collection began in April of 2019 with confidential individual interviews with each participant. Interviews were held off school grounds between April 5, 2019 and May 14, 2019. The researcher used a non-probability method of sampling, exercising judgment to select participants who were accessible and available. Participants were made available to the researcher through word of mouth, with contact information enabling the researcher to ascertain participant availability and agree on a meeting day and time. The interviews took place as planned without the need to rearrange or cancel an interview. No personal and/or organizational conditions influenced the participants. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality.

A digital recorder was used to record all interviews and a digital voice recording application was used as a backup. The researcher transcribed the data collected from interviews and made anecdotal notes during the interviews. After each interview, participants were given an opportunity to review the transcriptions and approve or modify the content. All data was stored on a flash drive in a locked file cabinet in a room to which only the researcher has access, and will remain stored for the next 3 years. At the end of 3 years, the researcher will dispose of the data.

Throughout the interview process the researcher observed and recorded emotionality, tonality, and non-verbal language in field notes or reflections. When asking questions and listening to answers, the researcher probed as needed to extract further information and gain a

deeper understanding of the participant's experiences, beliefs about resiliency, and personality traits.

After collecting the data, the researcher read the data intently to begin the analytical process and created a code book which was updated throughout the process. Remaining open to emerging themes and patterns, the researcher began the initial process which included assigning names to segments or lines of data and placement under the coding element to which it belonged (in vivo, descriptive). Through a logging process, the data was organized to establish response patterns and note the emergence of themes and connections in the material. For first cycle coding, the researcher used in vivo, descriptive, emotion, and values coding, which allowed detection of commonalities resulting in the emergence of patterns and themes. A profile of categories and themes emerged for each participant. Cross-participant analysis was performed across the 20 participants by comparing themes and examining outliers. In addition, the researcher created a summary table of the findings with three columns for delineation to connect the interview questions to the emergent patterns and themes from the second cycle of coding. Data was interpreted and the findings were summarized to provide a comprehensive overview.

### **Influences on Educational Career**

As the participants discussed the influences that moved them towards the field of education, certain themes emerged. The first theme that became apparent was the belief of the participants that they were "called" to the profession. Five of the participants explained that no single influence prompted them to become teachers; they just knew in their hearts that teaching was their "calling." Billy, a teacher with 14 years teaching experience, stated, "I was born to teach." He further claimed that his passion for the field was so great that he would die in the classroom. Billy reported that he grew up impoverished in Algeria, where education was not as divisive and students learned regardless of their socio-economic status. He did not find the same

circumstance in the United States, and felt that students born into poverty here had a difficult time having equal access to education. Billy knew that he wanted to teach in an urban district.

The next prominent theme in the interview process was the influential role that family and other role models (Ralph & MacPhail, 2015) had in shaping participants' interest in teaching. Six out of 20 participants discussed how their own career choice was impacted by the career choices of their parents or someone else in their family; for example, parents who taught in urban education. Through the participants' stories about growing up watching their parents, what emerged was the major impact their parents had on students who seemed to need so much more than education. Lena, a high school teacher with over 10 years in urban education, discussed not only her parents but also her parents' friends as being educators who had a major influence on her career choice and practicing within urban education. She recalled going to the schools where her parents taught and building relationships with the students at the school. In fact, Lena expressed joy at seeing many of the students in her home and was really inspired by the family-like atmosphere amongst staff and students. She was aware of educators at her parents' school who adopted certain students and put them through school. Lena imagined her life impacting students much the same way. Likewise, Cliff, a teacher with 24 years in urban education, discussed the influence of his mother who was an educator in an urban school for 34 years. He recalled assisting with lesson plans growing up, and returning home from college breaks and substitute teaching in urban schools, where he found he had a natural talent.

A theme that impacted 6 participants was the influence of teachers/educators who guided them into education or who assisted in their development as a teacher. According to Fray and Gore (2018), teachers and mentors have an influence on their students choosing teaching as a career. This was the case for Robert, a high school teacher with 12 years of experience who

planned to pursue law as a chosen career. He had a conversation with his high school senior English teacher, and observed that “he was the one that kind of prompted me to want to become a teacher.” Paula, a high school teacher with 17 years of teaching in the same urban high school she attended, lived in an urban project until homelessness claimed the family. Coupled with mental illness and alcoholism, the family was moved to a shelter. “My first and second grade teacher visited me for 6 months and that has always had a tremendous impression on me.”

While Fray and Gore (2018) stated that a negative interaction with an educator may deter someone from a career in education, for two participants a negative interaction was the impetus for choosing a career in education. Judy, an elementary school teacher with 25 years of experience in urban education, described her negative experience as a catalyst for making change with each child she interacts with in her classroom. She described many negative interactions with her guidance counselor at a magnet urban high school she attended. This counselor repeatedly made disparaging remarks not only to Judy but to other students as well, as she found out after she graduated. According to Judy, this counselor always said mean and destructive things to the students. Judy vividly recalled a particular experience that continues to motivate her work as a teacher. It was the end of the school year and the counselor had Judy in her office with other students, asking them what they wanted to be when they finished school. When Judy stated that she wanted to be a doctor, the counselor laughed and the kids in the office laughed. Everyone in that office said, “You’re never going to be a doctor.” Judy replied, “If I never become a doctor, then I will make doctors. And I would make more than just me. I will make a bunch of doctors.” When asked what made her stay in urban education, Judy reflected, “If I could just get one more doctor in. I have a doctor right now in my class.”

Seventeen participants started their careers immediately in the urban school setting; however, three out of 20 participants began their careers in suburban education. The three teachers who started their careers in suburban education before changing to an urban educational setting discussed an inability to relate to the suburban setting. Sherry, a high school teacher with 5 years of experience teaching in urban education, is one example of someone who started her career in suburban education but found that she did not enjoy the elitist attitudes of the suburban faculty and parents. Sherry reported that students in the urban setting looked at the teachers as more than teachers, more like parental figures, which endeared them to her. This was also the case for Sharon, who initially worked for a suburban district before switching over into an urban district. According to Sharon, an elementary school teacher with 25 years in urban education, the students and parents in the suburban district had so much privilege that it was hard to deal with the parents. She found that she could love all children but she could not love all parents. Sharon found her calling when she entered into urban education. Even though the students presented an abundance of challenges, Sharon found that she would rather deal with those challenges within an urban setting than deal with the entitlement of parents within a suburban setting.

### **Ethnic and Gender Identity**

While ethnicity and gender were not included in the interview questions, six of the participants indicated that it weighed heavily on their decision to continue teaching in an urban setting. Identifying ethnically with the students that they teach influenced six of the participants to stay in the urban environment, while identifying based on gender influenced three of the participants to stay. The desire to teach students who looked like the teachers seemed to have a major impact on seeking employment within the urban school district and one of the primary reasons they continued to teach within the setting. As is the case in the research that suggests

African American teachers feel a connection to and oneness with African American students (Dickar, 2008), the participants in this study felt a sense of solidarity with the students in the urban setting. Sharon asserted, “I wanted to see my color. If I had something to offer somebody, I wanted to offer it to my children.” This was also the case for Kathy, who not only felt that it was important to work with children who look like her but also parents who look like her because she educates both parents and students. Tanya, an elementary teacher with 16 years of experience in urban education, is another example of a participant who wanted to teach within an urban setting, particularly the one that she grew up in, because she wanted her students to see someone that they could look up to. Tanya also thought that it was important to give back to the city where she lived during her formative years. Many of the participants, when discussing the identification of ethnicity with the students they taught every day, were filled with a passion that manifested in their speech and in many cases that they self-identified as passion in their voices. These cultural beliefs separated these participants from their Caucasian counterparts and seemed to implicitly add further weight to teaching in urban districts.

Out of six male participants, two spoke at length about the impact of their gender on their decision to continue teaching within the urban environment. Maurice, a high school science teacher who has been teaching for 15 years, explained that he is influenced by both his ethnicity and his gender. He stated,

My calling is actually in the urban setting, you know. What I have found out is the fact that these kids look like me, you know, you see a lot of teachers come in, use the system, and leave—that type of thing. So I don’t see myself anywhere else but in the urban setting because the service I provide and the face that I’m seen like a role model to kids that actually need to see someone like me around. You know what I mean, by the fact that African American males in science. There’s not a lot. It’s rare.

Maurice’s point of view aligns with Green and Martin’s (2018) stance that teachers play a pivotal role in reversing the negative academic and social perceptions of black students,



especially black males. He described his decision to continue to teach in an urban setting as an important one to the culture and to the gender. Cliff described his interest in how many black males are currently teaching in urban education. He went on to discuss how his own curiosity led him to count the number of males to females present in his building. He counted 45 females and nine men in the building, and of those nine men, only two were in the classroom at that time. As one of two men in the classroom, Cliff believes that he is standing for something by being present in the building in a K-8 setting. Both Cliff's and Maurice's feelings coincide with research that speaks to the importance of having black male teachers in positions of authority within schools to provide children the opportunity to see their own race as positive role models in the classroom. (Green & Martin, 2018).

### **Urban Education**

Another theme that emerged was the role that participants own urban education played in their decision to teach in an urban setting. The commonality between teachers and students who grew up in identical settings, albeit different urban cities, was critical to relating to students and staying committed to educating them. This commonality seemed to cross both racial lines and gender lines. Whether the participant was African American, Hispanic, or Caucasian, they felt connected to the urban community because of where they lived growing up to want to be an educator in urban settings for their students. Ten of the 20 participants—African American, White, and Spanish—mentioned growing up in an inner city and the impact it had on their decision to teach and to continue teaching in an urban setting. This was the case for David, a teacher with 11 years teaching experience in urban education, who grew up in an urban area and wanted to give back and show the students that you can make it out. One participant who grew up in an inner city in Algeria, Billy, felt that the poor students in America needed his expertise.

He believes that students are the same everywhere, but that the way he approaches and teaches them may help raise test scores in the urban school where he teaches. Billy teaches math in a high school setting, and believes that he was born to teach and that the location cannot define you. He explained,

I think everywhere there is only one school. In the whole world the way I see it there is not two different schools except in America, where there are two different schools. I think from my investigation coming from the parent, how much money they make is important. You can find really smart students in urban schools. You see, if you travel in another part of the world, you see poor kids, they succeed. I'm glad they changed the SAT. The previous SAT, it was just rich people who can do better. Because they have the book, they have the tutor, they have somebody who help them at home. Most of urban school, they don't have somebody to help them at home. Because most parents work, they come home tired or maybe they're not from that knowledge.

Billy asked to be placed in the school where he currently teaches because the scores were extremely low and teacher consistency was especially poor. He felt that he was needed at this particular school within the district. Tanya, who also grew up in an inner city, spoke of feeling the need to be there for them because she loves her kids and she is from the same inner city in which she currently teaches. She believes that she is making a difference, if not in all of their lives then at least some of their lives, and believes that one day when they grow up, the kids will speak of the difference she made in their lives. A pattern that developed was that teachers who teach in urban education do so because they feel familiar with the urban environments in which they themselves were raised. Tony is an example, reporting, "I'm not exposed to a suburban environment so my first instinct was to gravitate to urban education." Holding the same sentiment was Robert, who grew up in an inner city close to the one in which he currently teaches. Robert stated, "I always wanted to stay close to home ... growing up in an urban community I knew what it was like to see what education was like in the urban setting ... I wanted to step in and make a difference." Teachers also teach in the same urban settings in

which they themselves were raised. Michelle is an example of a teacher who was actually born and raised in the same inner city where she presently works. She knew from an early age that she wanted to be a teacher and she knew that she wanted to come back to the same community of which she had been a part.

## **Challenges**

“Urban schools tend to serve concentrations of students whose experiences with and orientations toward schooling are often different from and sometimes in conflict with mainstream assumptions and attitudes toward schooling” (Mastsko & Hammerness, 2014), which often brings many challenges that teachers in urban settings must face. Seven of the 20 participants supported the idea of the different forms in which education unfolds for the students (and thus the teachers) in urban education. One of the 20 participants, Sharon, asserted,

Children come to school with so much more than a mind to learn. I’ve learned over time that some of the issues that they have going on at home, it seeps over.

I’m a parent, a nurse, a doctor, a social worker, a counselor.

Ruby’s experience also offers a clear example of the conflict with mainstream assumptions and attitudes towards schooling. She described the following:

Many children come to school and this is the only place that they find structure and discipline. At home, they are more or less on their own. In some cases, they might be raising younger siblings. So it’s very difficult to get them used to that routine, and I find that they yearn for it. They want that structure. They know that they need it and it’s what’s best for them, but it’s hard to get them, to convince them to get it started.

Paula explained the differences in attitude of urban students from suburban students having a more mainstream educational experience, mentioning that students in from the urban

environment have very strong emotional and physical demands on them, so just having them come to class is huge when they're tired or hungry, or angry, or mad at someone, and they take it out on you as the teacher.

Given the complexity of factors that contribute to teacher attrition, understanding or exploring in more depth with the participants their challenges in urban education was an integral part of this study. All 20 of the participants spoke of the challenges of working in an urban school district, and while there were many challenges facing the participants, there were commonalities in several areas. Eight out of 20 participants focused on lack of discipline among students, eight spoke of lack of support from the administration (Freedman & Appleman, 2009), 12 spoke of lack of funds to purchase supplies, and 12 spoke of lack of resources in the home (Torres, 2011). A lack of support from parents (Brill & McCartney, 2008) was a challenge raised by six of the participants. Dawn, a teacher with 10 years of experience in urban education, said that the lack of parental support was a challenge. Another participant, Paula, mentioned that lack of parental and community support was her biggest challenge. "We know that our students come from some very emotional almost physical demands on them and so just having them come to class when they're tired, or hungry, or angry, or mad at someone is huge, but they put it all on you."

On the other hand, eight of the 20 participants spoke of the lack of student discipline (Brill & McCartney, 2008) as a challenge in urban education. David stated that discipline was a problem, and cited a bad home life as contributing to the student's overall anger and making teaching difficult. Amy described her teaching situation thus: "no two days are the same." She went on to say that personalities clashed and behaviors clashed. Many students had not been

nurtured and they looked to her for it, and she described it as “draining.” “They are so needy, and I am only one person.”

In addition to behavior, discipline was categorized by two participants as self-discipline or motivation. Sherry explained, “You need discipline in order to get your goals accomplished. The children aren’t prepared and are not ready to learn and they don’t have a will to learn.” Tony felt that lack of motivation on the part of students was his biggest challenge, and one that would drive many teachers away from an urban district. He also described the lack of motivation as detrimental to urban communities that lacked the ability to make long-range goals.

Eight out of 20 participants described a lack of administrative support as one of the leading challenges (Torres, 2011) impacting their educational experience. When considering the absence of administrative support, particularly as it pertains to resources, Sherry emphasized that the challenges she faced were not with the students. She felt that the suburban districts have all of the necessary resources, top-of-the-line equipment and everything that urban districts don’t have. “I can’t ask for \$200 to buy necessary supplies so it comes out of my pocket. We are using 13-year-old textbooks. Every year they say maybe next year when I ask for new textbooks.” Maurice noted that there were many challenges working in an urban school district. In particular, he cited lack of resources, especially for a science teacher. “It’s like patching things together” to do hands-on and lab-based activities.

Through in-depth dialogue with the participants, it was discovered that for three of the eight participants citing a lack of administrative support, administrative changes were a critical reason that administrative support was lacking. “How can one grow if there isn’t a consistent level of support, administrative changes?” asked Lena. “You worry about your job, the paper responsibility.”

While safety was not a major theme that emerged, it made enough of an impression upon two of the participants that they discussed it at length. Both worked in two of the more dangerous neighborhoods ridden with crime. Dena explained, “It’s very dangerous where I teach. I’m concerned about my safety.” Another participant’s safety concern focused on the students he taught; Billy felt many of his students were afraid to talk freely in class lest they provoke another student. He noticed that his students were highly concerned about their safety, observing:

Some students in the urban school are scared to come. Sometimes there is a shooting, there is a lockdown, so they don’t tell you, but they share with me—Oh I don’t want to be there because there was a shooting.

Despite the many challenges faced within urban teaching environments, all 20 of the participants agreed that the challenges were not enough to drive them out of urban education or education in general (He, Cooper, & Tangredi, 2015).

### **Influences on Retention**

Perseverance emerged as a theme throughout this study as the participants said that there is a need to persevere in the field of teaching. Teachers with staying power in high poverty schools enter with and maintain an unrelenting persistence (Tricarico, Jacobs, & Yendol-Hoppey, 2015), which became apparent through the interviews with the 20 participants. In fact, 10 of the participants cited not only their own perseverance as contributing to their ability to continue teaching for as long as they have, but also the perseverance of the students. Judy spoke about the many times she was ready to leave the profession but thought about the students’ unwillingness to give up despite the many traumatic events that had happened and continued to happen to them. Because they show up at school, she decided that she could as well. Judy was

adamant: “This urban community has resilience. So I can’t have resilience? I got to have it because they have it.” A study by Yost (2006) articulates the role that resilience and perseverance play among teachers who remain in the profession despite being confronted with the same consistent challenges and obstacles compared to those who chose to leave the profession. Judy believes that she manifests this perseverance, as does Robert, who spoke about the teachers whom he has seen quickly leave the profession. Billy also spoke about the many teachers who left the school that he now teaches in, and how damaging it is to the students and teachers left behind. Ronfeldt et al. (2012) completed a study which supports Billy, in that it spoke of the disruptive effect that teacher turnover has on all the members of the school community.

Teachers remain in urban schools despite challenging conditions for a variety of reasons that go beyond working conditions (He et al., 2015); as such, participants were asked why they stayed in urban education given the challenges of discipline and lack of administrative and parental support. One of the salient themes that emerged was the relationship participants had with their students—a relationship they often considered rewarding even when draining. The need for teachers to be more than teachers was a pressing factor that sealed bonds with the students into a more nurturing and supportive role that went beyond educating them. Melissa offered an example of this dynamic: “The kids. I’ve had students living in my house. I’ve had parents sign over guardianship. It’s the relationships that you nurture and create with these kids.” Twelve of the participants cited their relationships with their students as the reason they remain in urban education.

Although Dena has been tempted to leave urban education, due to the challenges of lack of support and resources, lack of parental support, and most recently the commute from her

home, she stays because she would miss the students. Teachers within the fabric of urban education consider their reward in teaching to be meaningful relationships with their students (He et al., 2015). When queried why she stays in urban education, Ruby, an example of this, cited the relationship that she has with the kids: “I love the kids.” After 27 years in the same building, she realized that she had taught some of the children’s parents. Ruby believes that maintaining those relationships has been critical to her success as a teacher, enabling her to build bonds beyond the classroom. Kathy cited “those faces” as the reason to stay in urban education. “Where I can work with children who look like me and even parents now who look like me because I feel like in the last 10 years I’ve been educating parents as well as students. So, no, I don’t want to exit urban education.”

Another theme that manifested was the calling/passion to the field of teaching in urban settings, which participants honored more than their weariness over constant challenges. Three participants described having a passion for the field as the reason for staying in urban education. Michelle is an example, saying, “I really love what I do.” Not only did Michelle love the art of teaching, but she loved the setting in which she teaches. She believes her calling is for teaching students within urban settings. Moreover, the idea of leaving stability and comfort has stopped four participants from exiting the field. Their years of service (11 to 27 years) and feeling like they understand the routine of teaching in that building or in that particular district has dissuaded these participants from leaving. They described their setting as comfort and stability. This was the case for David, who described the thought of leaving as leaving his comfort zone. David grew up and continues to live in the community where he works and attended school in the same city where he is currently employed. Working and living in the community offers an added level of comfort that he is not willing to abandon.



## **Conscientiousness**

Trait definitions for conscientiousness, resiliency, emotional stability, extraversion, agreeableness, and openness were presented to the participants during the interviews. Personality was found to be a predictor of voluntary and avoidable turnover (Barrick & Zimmerman, 2009). The primary focus of this study was on the personality traits of conscientiousness and resiliency as indicators of teacher retention in an urban school district. When they looked at the definition of conscientiousness, what emerged for 13 of the teachers was the focus and alignment with the disciplinary aspect of the definition. For example, Billy stated: “In life, the more you discipline yourself, you succeed, and the more organized, you never agonize.” Another example was Tony, who described his upbringing as instilling discipline. He was disciplined in school as a child and stated that island life (in Jamaica) required him to be disciplined. “Once I start something, I finish it.” Tony believes that having this type of discipline has enabled him to stay in urban education and has steadied him in life despite the challenges and obstacles that have come into his life personally and professionally. Tony referenced the importance of conscientiousness to his job, which he referred to as “not a regular job” because he believes that being responsible and reliable comes with the territory. Being able to come to school every day knowing that there are students who don’t know what they need to know forces him to go to work every day. “When the year begins, I have a job to do until 191 days are over.” Tony does not think he would be the same person without the discipline that has governed his life.

Discipline was the focus of Lena’s remarks regarding conscientiousness. “Students need order; they don’t have people who are reliable, but first they need a foundation. That foundation to me is that discipline.” She stated that students relied on her discipline, orderliness, and consistency so that they can rely on her emotional support, or that support they may not have

outside the school. After discipline, Lena concluded that her reliability made the biggest impact on her students, particularly because she believed that if she was reliable then her students would use her as a role model to become reliable themselves in their own lives and in school.

When asked if the personality trait of conscientiousness helped or hindered his retention in urban education, David replied:

Helped. Discipline, order, diligence, that's what we're talking about? I'm not going to say it's a walk in the park. It's definitely difficult, especially when I had 34 kids in here at once. Just trying to keep order the best way, trying to reach all the students the best I could, they confuse calmness with weakness. You have to have order no matter, when you're teaching.

Five of the participants focused on orderliness when they considered conscientiousness. Dena was one such example; she identified the importance of discipline but focused primarily on orderliness, stating that students respond to structure. "They find it more of a safe environment when it's ordered." On the contrary, Kathy described orderliness as a hindrance to teachers who are orderly to the exclusion of the other descriptors of conscientiousness. "They can't be flexible." She herself described her conscientiousness as a place where she retreats to find discipline and order. She makes lists of what needs to be done and she finds that calming.

## **Resilience**

Resilience has been studied in depth as it relates to children and their ability to bounce back and thrive despite experiencing harrowing circumstances. However, the capacity of a teacher to be resilient can also be studied and used as a concept to describe why teachers stay in urban schools (Tricarico, Jacobs, & Yendol-Hoppey, 2015). The need to exercise their resiliency more frequently is what became evident and imprinted as a core belief amongst the teachers interviewed. The participants were queried about the need for resiliency in order to facilitate

teacher retention; all 20 were unanimous in the belief that for a teacher to remain in urban education he or she had to possess a level of resiliency. For example, Kathy believes that resilience is something that teachers who work in urban settings must have. “You can easily break down. I know teachers who have left education because of one student. And that student is (verbally) attacking you because of some other reason that has nothing to do with you.”

In addition, Robert has seen many colleagues leave urban districts looking for something different because of the wear and tear on them. As a result, Robert felt that resiliency was an important factor in teacher retention. “Especially in an urban community, things are changing on the daily. If you’re not able to easily adapt, it’s going to be very, very difficult for you. I’ve had to make adjustments.” Melissa’s belief is similar to Robert and Kathy’s with regard to the value of resiliency. She stated, “Because, I feel like, in urban districts, there are so many obstacles thrown at you from the school level, from the district level, from the state level. And, it just makes you angry. But I just, am able to, sort of, navigate around it. Like, I have my moment of anger and frustration. And my thoughts of, oh my gosh, I need to quit. But then I just get over it and navigate around it.”

Three of the participants linked resilience with ever-changing curricula. For instance, Cliff described his resilience in terms of the curriculum, having been in the district long enough to have been through many curricula. He’s learned not to take it personally and to adjust. “We change the curriculum every time someone comes with an idea; the administration buys it, and we must ‘follow them’.” Maurice also cited the curriculum as a source of resiliency for the same reasons as Cliff, saying, “But you have to have resilience to teach in the urban district because, like I said, today you could have one curriculum, tomorrow it changes.” Conversely, Tanya linked resiliency to the ability to bounce back and stated: “You never bounce back. A lot of

feelings come from just what you are used to. You just learn that when there are hurdles in the road, you just jump over that hurdle and keep it moving. In an urban district, there are a lot of hurdles.”

Three respondents linked their development of resilience to adversity, either in their childhood or as an urban teacher. Dawn described her resilience as being forged both in her childhood and as an urban educator:

I was raised in a situation where I faced a lot of adversity, so to speak. So that is part of my growing up, to understand that nothing is perfect and you’re forced through and make the best of that situation. So that just carries over into adulthood and you use that in your professional life and your personal life.

She further stated: “You have to be resilient because you’re not going to be able to cope. You are going to get easily frustrated and want to move onto the next thing. So I think that has to be a factor to teach in an urban setting.” When Dawn looked at her fellow urban educators, she has seen those who have stayed to become “career teachers” and those who have exited the system quickly. Dawn asserted that as an urban educator, if the mindset is not one in which you accept an imperfect system and yet still believe that you can forge ahead within that system and make a difference, find a solution and add value, then you will most likely exit just as fast as you entered the system.

Keogh et al. (2010) asserted that resilience is something that can be taught to novice teachers with the hope of sustaining their ability to cope within the chaotic education structures present in urban settings. During the interviews, participants were asked if they believed resiliency was something they were born with (nature) or a trait they developed over time (nurture), and the participants were varied in their responses. According to Table 4 below, while

one participant stated that it was something she was born with, four participants felt that it was both—you were born with it and you enhanced it over time. An emergence saw 11 participants who believed that it was something that developed either in their childhood due to extraordinary experiences, or as teachers who needed the skill to survive in the urban school environment.

Tony believes he was born resilient. He believes that teachers in urban education could develop resiliency if they have empathy. “They can fall in love with teaching urban youth.”

Paula responded that resilience was a little of both, stating:

You are born with it and you can develop it. My mother’s always said to me that I am a very sweet girl, meaning that I let things go. I’ve always been that one, so I imagine I was born that way and as I have gotten older, I think I have cultivated that because I really appreciate the idea that, I love the idea that I’m very accommodating and flexible.

For three teachers in this study, the ability to bounce back in the face of adversity stood out most when discussing the nature versus nurture aspect of resilience. Sharon elaborated on nature versus nurture when she described adversity in her life:

“I’ll say this, it went back and forth. I want to say I was more resilient as my daughter was younger because, due to unfortunate reasons with my husband, I had no choice but to be resilient because I was the only one who was putting a roof over her head. So a lot of things that I didn’t like, or I felt like I couldn’t take, I knew I had to take because I was the only breadwinner in that house. It made me more resilient towards moving with change.

Sharon observed that this time period in her life made her develop resilience or increase her level of resilience because she was propelling herself forward for her daughter’s survival.

She believes that the resilience she developed has stayed with her throughout her life, and she relies heavily on it during her tenure in urban education.

Table 4.  
*Self-Rated Level of Resilience and Nature/Nurture Source of Resilience*

<b>Participant Pseudonym/ Gender</b>	<b>Grade Level Taught</b>	<b>Years in Urban Education</b>	<b>Self-Rated Level of Resilience</b>	<b>Nature/Nurture Belief</b>
Amy (F)	7,8	16	8	Nature
Billy (M)	11,12	14	10	Nurture
Cliff (M)	8	24	8	Nurture
David (M)	10,11	11	7 or 8	Nurture
Dawn (F)	Mixed	10	NR	Both
Dena (F)	5	8	9	Nurture
Judy(F)	K-8	25	9	Nurture
Kathy (F)	Middle	18	8	Nurture
Lena(F)			8	Both
Maurice (M)	12	15	7	Both
Melissa(F)	12	23	Not sure	Both
Michelle (F)	9-12	21	10	Nurture
Paula (F)	11,12	17	7 or 8	Nature
Robert (M)	12	12	10	Nurture
Ruby (F)	2	27	10	Nurture
Sharon (F)	4	25	8	Nurture
Sherry (F)	10	5	NR	Nurture
Tanya (F)	5	16	6	Nature
Tony (M)	9,10,11,12	25	9	Nature
Trina (F)	2,3	25	8	Nurture

Participants were asked to read the definition and rate their level of resilience on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest level of resilience. Table 4 above presents the participants' self-ratings. Seven participants rated themselves above an 8; 13 rated themselves 8 and below. Tony gave himself a 9/10 rating before settling on 9, explaining that his "stubbornness against defeat, or defeatism, will always win out, always winning. So I believe that's why I said a 9 or 10." Michelle, who rated herself a 10, commented that a teacher must be able to adjust, particularly in an urban district; if you stay rigid and are uncomfortable with change and

adapting, it's difficult to last in urban teaching. On the other hand, Tanya rated herself a 6 because she does complain about the things she doesn't get and issues that she faces. But despite her complaints she continues to work hard to make changes. Another participant, Dawn, wasn't comfortable giving herself a 10 but gave herself an 8 because she did not want to say she was perfect. She explained that what made her resilient were her personality and commitment; her desire for stability, and understanding that it does not matter where you are or where you are going because nothing is perfect.

Participants were asked to rank five personality traits in order of importance. Eleven participants ranked resilience as the most valued trait; four ranked conscientiousness as the most valued trait. Ruby found value in all of the traits listed, but adamantly believed resiliency was valued most, saying, "I think if you're not resilient, you will not make it long term." However, Tony believed conscientiousness was most valued: "being disciplined, orderly, reliable, responsible. You have to be that for younger people." Billy's viewpoint was similar to Tony's; he argued that conscientiousness was integral to continuing to teach in urban settings. Kathy ranked resilience and conscientiousness at the top, explaining: "because those are the two things that I believe those are kind of almost like the glue, that if you have those things, you can hold on, and those other things, they'll definitely come."

Table 5 displays the full range of ranking order from the participants.

Table 5.  
*Ranking of Five Personality Traits by Individual Participants in Order of Importance*

<b>Participant Pseudonym/ Gender</b>	<b>Conscientiousness</b>	<b>Resilience</b>	<b>Emotional Stability</b>	<b>Agreeable-ness</b>	<b>Extra-version</b>
Amy	3	2	5	1	3
Billy (M)	1	2	5	3	NR
Cliff (M)	2	1	5	3	4
David (M)	3	1	4	2	5

<b>Participant Pseudonym/ Gender</b>	<b>Conscientiousness</b>	<b>Resilience</b>	<b>Emotional Stability</b>	<b>Agreeableness</b>	<b>Extra-version</b>
Dawn	3	1	2	4	5
Dena	1	2	NR	3	5
Judy	4	1	3	2	5
Kathy	1	2	4	3	5
Lena	NR	1	NR	NR	NR
Maurice (M)	4	1	3	2	5
Melissa	2	1	5	3	4
Michelle	2	1	4	3	5
Paula	3	1	2	4	NR
Robert (M)	3	4	1	5	2
Ruby	2	1	3	5	4
Sharon	3	2	1	4	4
Sherry	3	2	1	5	4
Tanya	NR	1	2	NR	NR
Tony (M)	1	3	2	4	5
Trina	4	2	1	3	5

*1 = most valued, NR = no response.*

### **Summary**

This chapter presented data from a qualitative case study in which responses were collected by use of a demographic protocol, a self-rating scale, a personality and resilience trait scale, and in-depth semi-structured interviews of 20 teachers with 3 or more years of teaching in an urban setting. The data collected allowed for the emergence of important salient themes and patterns which evolved through the interview process, as well as during the review and analysis of audio recordings and transcriptions.

Patterns and themes emerged through analysis of data that revealed the influences that drove the participants into the field of teaching and ignited what some referred to as “a calling” to the work. This passion for teaching began an extensive and often laborious path packed with challenges that oftentimes made them think about exiting the profession. However, what became



even more evident is the relationship with students, parents, and community which impelled them to stay.

The way participants viewed themselves ended up being critical to their retention. What the answers to the interview questions showcased was the dominant trait of resiliency present in their character as well as a somewhat lesser dominant trait, conscientiousness, which had an unquestionable influence on their teacher retention.

The research questions were all adequately addressed through the patterns and themes birthed in the interview process. The next chapter completes the dissertation with the implications for theory and practice related to teacher retention in an urban school district, and recommendations for future research.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings and Recommendations**

Teacher attrition has impacted urban schools drastically and created a harsh impression on staff and students. In this study the researcher's goal was to explore whether particular personality traits of conscientiousness and resilience had an influence on a teacher's retention for more than 5 years in an urban school district. This final chapter discusses the theoretical, practical, and policy implications of this study. First the problem statement and the research methods used to complete the investigation are reviewed. Next the findings are discussed, as well as implications for theory, practice, and policy. Finally the chapter presents future research recommendations to further expand the empirical evidence base on this topic.

### **Overview of the Study**

Currently, there is a shortage of teachers in the United States, where 90% of open teaching positions are due to teachers leaving the profession (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). There has been a dramatic increase in the shortage of teachers among the high-poverty urban school settings, where annual teacher turnover can top 20% (The National School Boards Association, 2017). The 20% teacher turnover in high-poverty urban school settings is at a rate 50% higher than affluent schools. In fact, Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) cited a 50% higher turnover rate in Title I schools and a 70% higher turnover of teachers in schools that service the largest concentrations of students of color.

The inner city setting has more stressful conditions that come with less support than other types of districts (Simon & Johnson, 2013). Moreover, the neighborhoods where the urban schools reside not only suffer from poverty and unemployment, but also are home to areas of high crime, poor social capital, and complicated bureaucratic systems (Jacobs, 2007). Other highly stressful working conditions that negatively impact teacher retention include lack of administrative support, high administrative turnover, chaotic organizational structures, lack of

parental involvement, high absenteeism and transience, and lack of student achievement (Jacobs, 2007).

Determining the right type of teacher who can work and thrive in such stressful conditions is important to drive down teacher attrition (Haberman, 2005); in fact, the focus within urban settings must be on teacher selection more so than on teacher training. Selecting teachers based on teacher credentials, GPA, references, and content knowledge is not effective when hiring for urban school settings (Haberman, 2005). Selecting individuals high in conscientiousness, extraversion, and emotional stability is important (Zimmerman, 2008). All of these traits are positively associated with job retention (Bastian et al., 2017).

Some teachers are resilient and persistent and able to remain in the profession despite being confronted with the same challenges and obstacles as those who leave (Yost, 2006). These individuals who display resilience adjust better and have higher attainment at all stages of life (Alessandri et al., 2012).

Because of the extreme teacher shortage within inner city school districts, identifying the personality characteristics of inner city teachers which make them more likely to stay in the teaching profession can potentially improve teacher retention through hiring practices which can include adding additional questions which look at personality or including a personality inventory to measure personality as a part of the hiring practice. Because urban schools will continue to exist under highly stressful conditions, this study identified the select personality traits of conscientiousness and resilience in teachers in an urban school setting who have stayed in the setting for more than 3 years, and adds to the limited existing literature on personality traits and resilience and their impact on teacher retention.

The following research questions guided this study:

- What was the influence, if any, of personality traits on teacher retention in an urban school district?
- What was the influence, if any, of resilience on teacher retention in an urban school district?
- To what extent, if at all, did participants believe they were resilient?
- To what extent, if at all, did personality traits influence resilience?

In order to answer the research questions I used qualitative research methodologies, as they were the most appropriate to gather data about the lived experiences of urban school teachers. I used a narrative research design because narrative inquiry collects the stories, narratives, and descriptions of people to understand their lives and experiences (Charmaz et al., 2011; Clandinin, 2007; Webster & Mertova, 2007). The main form of data collection was face-to-face semi-structured interviews. A total of 20 urban teachers participated in the study. Upon completion of the interviews, the data collected were analyzed using narrative analysis procedures including verbatim transcriptions and coding systems to find common themes and patterns (Webster & Mertova, 2007).

### **Interpretation of Findings**

The following section discusses how this study's findings relate to and extend the existing literature and data on select personality traits and resilience and how they influence teacher retention.

#### **Personality Traits and Teacher Retention**

The participating individuals in the study were all teachers who taught within the urban school setting and had been teaching for more than 5 years in that setting. All of the participants within this study were adamant that their ability to stay within the teaching field in an urban setting had a great deal to do with who they were as individuals. One participant believed that

leaving would make her a quitter, which she declared was not a part of her makeup. Likewise, another participant stated that she would try to overcome whatever challenge was presented to her in the field itself or in the world outside of teaching. Two participants spoke of their tenacity and stubbornness; another spoke of the ability to commit.

The literature has shown personality to be a useful predictor of avoidable turnover up to 2 years after the hire (Barrick & Zimmerman, 2009). Two traits found to be most significant were conscientiousness and emotional stability. When self-assessing personality traits, the majority of the participants noted that they were conscientious and emotionally stable, which they believed aided in their retention. However, in their interviews the teachers talked more about their level of conscientiousness than about emotional stability. Four of the participants felt conscientiousness was the most important trait they possess and that a teacher should possess, and another four believed that emotional stability was the most important trait they possess and that a teacher should possess. First-year teachers with higher levels of openness to experiences were found to be more likely to work in urban school settings (Education Policy Initiative at Carolina, 2015). In addition, first-year teachers with high levels of conscientiousness were found to predict teacher persistence with regard to retention (Education Policy Initiative at Carolina, 2015). Several of the participants also noted that they believed their extraversion was a factor in their retention.

Each participant spoke about the challenges inherent in the urban setting and faced every day as they considered whether or not they wanted to remain in their setting. Out of the 20 participants, only six reported that they had ever considered leaving. When asked what made them stay in education, all 20 participants cited a love or passion for the field of teaching and a love and passion for the students that they interface with on a daily basis. Each of the

participants felt that the role they played in their students' lives went deeper than just being a teacher, and that their impact on their students was that much more influential and life changing. One of the participants stated that every good person cannot leave because the students need to have amazing individuals around them, and she considered herself amazing. Another participant observed that her goal was to make doctors, and she wanted to get just one more doctor into the world. Of the participants who considered leaving the field, one spoke about the feeling of being beaten down towards the end of the school year, which caused them to question whether or not they would remain in the field. However, when the summer concluded, she experienced a feeling of renewal which allowed her to bounce back and become excited for the new school year. Another participant who considered leaving stated that she always wanted to figure out a different method to keep assisting students, so she stayed. Yet another participant who considered leaving stated that the kids make you stay from year to year.

Another factor that influenced the participants to stay in the field in the urban setting was their own experiences growing up in an urban environment, whether in the urban setting where they currently teach or another urban setting. The idea of being able to relate to the students appealed to them, as well as the image that they were able to present to the students: "I am you and you are me." This image was particularly critical to their remaining in the current setting. There was a strong belief that if "I got out," so can you. This image consciousness was particularly important to the male teacher who taught in elementary school because of the lack of male teachers in elementary education.

### **Teachers and Resiliency**

There is a strong interest in resilience among teachers because building resiliency skills in novice teachers is critical to counteracting the high rates of attrition in the educational field (Keogh et al., 2010). Every one of the participants believed that they had some level of

resiliency. The biggest differences among the participants were the level of resiliency they believed they possessed. As a matter of fact, most of the participants rated themselves between an 8 and a 10 on a self-rating scale, with 10 being the highest). Only one participant rated themselves a 6, which was the lowest rating among the participants. Moreover, 12 of the participants believed that resilience was something that could be developed, four believed that one had to be born with resiliency, and four believed both that one could be born with resiliency and that resiliency could be developed. When ranking the traits they valued most, females were most consistent in their rankings, identifying resilience as their most valuable trait (eight females). Males were less consistent across the board, but most consistent with three ranking resiliency as their most valuable trait. Emotional Stability and Conscientiousness received an equal number of votes as the second most valuable trait (four votes each).

In terms of the teachers' grade levels, six high school teachers ranked resiliency as the most valued trait (six votes) and conscientiousness and emotional stability once again tied for most valued trait (two votes each). Middle school teachers were varied across the board with one vote each for conscientiousness, agreeableness, and resiliency. Elementary teachers ranked resiliency as the most valued trait with four votes; emotional stability was next with two votes, and conscientiousness was last with one vote. Among the participants who have been teaching for more than 10 years in an urban school setting, seven valued resilience most, three valued emotional stability most, and two valued conscientiousness most.

When discussing the relevance of resiliency in teaching within an urban environment, every one of the participants believed it to be a prerequisite for one's ability to remain teaching in an urban setting for more than 3 years. While many of the participants believed that some circumstances might draw you to teach within an urban setting, resiliency is what enabled you to

stay despite the many challenges that one faces as a teacher. Being resilient allows one to recognize that the conditions present are adverse, but one is able to identify options for coping and to implement appropriate solutions (Taylor, 2013), all of which are crucial in the urban setting. Several participants' comments pointed to a pattern of belief wherein the ability to read a situation and to shift at a moment's notice and identify what needs to be done next is paramount to working in an urban setting.

Resilient teachers are able to handle poor working conditions while having an awareness that these conditions exist (Yonezawa et al., 2011). The participants discussed a keen awareness of these working conditions. The literature consulted cited several types of poor working conditions that are present in urban school settings. Torres (2011) discussed lack of administrative support, inadequate resources, and workload. While Lentfer and Frank (2015) cited difficulty managing classroom behaviors, Krasnoff (2014) reported difficulty managing classroom behaviors as well as the tendency for novice teachers being assigned to the most difficult or problematic classrooms. All of these contribute to the attrition of teachers. The participants in this study noted how these working conditions contributed to a feeling of being overwhelmed, which caused many of them to contemplate another professional field. Each of the participants spoke about having to dig deep into their resolve to bounce back and maintain a high quality of work, with the goal of making a difference in the lives of the students.

Although all of the workplace conditions caused enormous stress for the teachers, the lack of parental support seemed to impact them on a more personal level. The harm to the overall system caused by lack of parental support was monumental, but the hurt caused to individual students with whom the teachers had built personal relationships was hurtful to the teachers and therefore caused the most damage. Because of the lack of parental support, teachers



in the urban setting were forced to take on parental roles for many of their students. Some of the participants discussed spending their own money on resources and other personal products the students needed. One of the participants had students who lived in her home, and had parents sign over guardianship. Another participant reported that the students referred to her as “ma.” These deeply personal relationships formed between teacher and student within the urban setting makes the overall negligence that much more devastating.

### **Personality Traits on Resiliency**

When studying the information given from the participants, it did not appear that personality traits had an influence on resiliency. However, a few of the participants saw themselves as stubborn, and/ or persistent when describing their refusal to give up, which may in fact be a resilience factor. When discussing resiliency, one participant felt strongly that a part of resiliency was stubbornness noting that resiliency and stubbornness were strongly connected. Whether or not stubbornness may be connected to resiliency may be researched further in a future study.

When given the definitions of personality traits and resilience, several of the participants focused on the traits and identified one or more in their own personality. Those particular participants did not lead with resilience, but they did speak about the importance of resilience in teachers who were able to stay in the field of teaching within an urban setting. In fact, these same participants felt that it was mandatory for teachers to have resilience if they were to teach in urban school settings. The majority of the participants included resilience in their descriptions of themselves, but varied in their opinions about whether resilience or some other trait was more important to have when teaching in urban settings.

## **Teachers and Personal Challenges/Experiences**

Research cited the need for adversity to be present in a person's life to promote development of resiliency (Forbes & Fikretoglu, 2018) and strengthen the individual (Tait, 2008). Many of the teachers who rated themselves high on the resiliency self-scale cited personal challenges in their own lives which made them resilient. The teachers believed resiliency could be developed in a teacher whether or not they experienced personal challenges, but also noted the important role of personal experience in developing resiliency. One of the participants discussed her own bout with homelessness as a child, another talked about poverty impacting his childhood, and another mentioned growing up with a single parent and the challenges of that situation. The teachers also connected their ability to overcome the challenges they have faced in the urban setting with what they have had to overcome in their personal lives. They believed that their earlier experiences prepared them for teaching in urban schools.

Another significant personal experience that impacted participants' retention as teachers was growing up in an urban setting. The majority of the participants grew up in urban settings similar to where they teach, and experienced many of the same challenges as the students they teach. The difference in every one of their lives was an adult role model who pushed them to excel. Whether the adult was a parent, teacher, counselor, administrator, or other adult, it made the difference in how their lives turned out as well as their career choice. These teachers desired to have the same impact on their students. In more than one instance, the impact of the adult was a negative one that made the teacher want to keep it from happening to other students, believing they could help to ensure positive impacts on children.

Although limited to one district, this study identified some generalizable factors associated with teacher retention. It also offers links between personality traits and retention. Despite the limitation of the study in focusing on self-reporting, trustworthiness and believability

of findings were established by keeping accurate records, field notes, transcripts, participant review of transcripts, and a coding book, which established creditability.

### **Implications for Theory**

This study explored two theories, personality theory and resilience theory. Jung's (1921) personality theory implies that there are various ways not only of apprehending but also of functioning in the world (Salman, 2008); Jung initially described this functioning as "psychological types" (Jung, 1921). Psychological types evolved into trait theory, from which The Big Five emerged. Traits are considered basic units of personality and are a part of a person (Liebert & Spiegel, 1998). The second theory that was critical to this study was resilience theory. Resilience Theory refers to an individual's ability to bounce back in the face of adversity and took a particularly close look at ego-resiliency in adults (Block & Block, 1980) as a meta-level personality trait. This research expanded on the limited available literature, tying personality and resilience to teacher retention within an urban school setting.

In this study, specific personality traits of conscientiousness and emotional stability along with resilience were shown to have a critical impact on teacher retention, with resilience the most dominant factor. According to the study findings, when teachers were asked to examine and rate the traits, resilience was the one they believed contributed to their retention and was important for all teachers to possess if they were to teach in an urban setting. Most teachers believed that an individual was typically born with resilience, but that it could also be developed within a person. There was clarity about the types of adversity that many of these teachers faced in their childhood. Their ability to overcome these adversities and the confidence that developed as a result was applied in every area of their lives, particularly their career in urban education. The same principles that were utilized to handle their individual adverse experiences continued to be applied as challenges in their chosen field arose, and determined their response. This finding

gives credibility to Belsky and Pluess' (2013) assertion that an individual's innate responsiveness to environmental conditions determines how that individual will respond to positive or negative experiences.

Although not as valued as conscientiousness and resiliency, the findings also revealed the importance of a teacher's emotional stability to successful navigation of the urban teaching experience. When dissecting the definition of emotional stability, the word that resonated with the participants was calmness. They saw their ability to be calm in the midst of a chaotic educational structure as key to retention and to shepherding their students through the chaos, which allowed the students to be protected and still learn. However, when analyzing the definition of conscientiousness, every key term was deemed critical to what the teachers considered to be a conscientious individual and teacher. Many of the participants insisted that in the urban setting in particular, if one were conscientious one would have to be diligent, disciplined, ordered, and reliable. Many believed that the only way to survive in the urban setting was to embody each of these descriptors of conscientiousness.

### **Implications for Practice**

According to Aragon (2016), the Education Commission of the United States discussed the persistent staffing challenges that face urban settings where there are high poverty and minority populations and low achieving schools. Likewise, Brill and McCartney (2008) discussed exacerbation of poor teacher retention due to impoverished high minority schools. The findings in this study may offer some additional indicators to be used in the hiring and training of teachers within urban school settings. In the corporate setting conscientiousness and emotional stability have been found to predict turnover and performance (Zimmerman, 2008); as such, this study supports conscientiousness as an important factor in teacher retention. Understanding the

type of teacher being hired in an urban district and knowing what specific personalities work best in the setting are valuable tools.

The knowledge gained from the findings of this study have the potential to influence hiring practices in urban school districts by identifying applicants who are resilient and who have personality characteristics such as conscientiousness, which is favorable to sustainability within urban school districts. While other employment structures have been using personality tests for years, educational institutions generally have not used these tools in hiring practices. Due to the teacher shortage in the United States (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017), there is a need to integrate personality trait measures into hiring practices (Bastain et al., 2017) to determine who is best suited for an urban teaching experience. While there are more common personality trait scales, there are not many scales that address resilience, which is an important value to the hiring practice. The ER89 Trait Resilience Scale developed by Charles Figley has 14 items; answers are based on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (does not apply at all) to 4 (applies very strongly). Making such scales a part of the hiring process is likely to identify more resilient educators.

These findings also support the need for incorporating resilience into professional training for teachers already in the field, as well as novice teachers entering the field. Awareness of the importance of resilience for teacher retention is critical for administrators who are building out professional development for their districts. Through tools to measure resiliency, administrators could identify which teachers in the building need additional support, and provide the resiliency training.

Teacher programs would also benefit from the findings in this study, particularly programs in which some of the students have an interest in urban education and are taking

applicable classes. Understanding what it takes to experience a successful career teaching in urban school settings would help advisors, teachers, and other support staff to help students determine whether or not urban education is a correct fit, and how they could increase their resiliency to remain in the urban setting if they wanted their career there.

### **Implications for Policy**

One of the problems associated with hiring practices is the limited amount of information available about the candidate. Many times, candidates are new college graduates with limited references and little to no experience in the classroom setting. Thus, hiring managers are left resorting to indicators that do not speak to the type of person they are hiring. Looking at grades, school activities, and praxis scores is not enough to get a clear picture of who a candidate is and whether they will be able to work in high stress environments. Cannata et al. (2017) called the hiring process in education a rushed and information poor process, which makes it difficult to effectively hire new teachers.

One implication for policy that arose from this study is the introduction of mandatory resiliency training for novice teachers as they enter the field of education. Resiliency training can be done at the state level and instituted in a manner similar to various learning programs that are mandatory for new administrators. The training would be ongoing for a set number of years, and the teachers would be given tools and coping strategies. Currently the U.S. Army utilizes a 10-day resilience program entitled Master Resilience Training (MRT) which is composed of different modules that cover three main components: preparation, sustainment, and enhancement. The modules include self-awareness, self-regulation, mental agility, optimism, connections, and character strengths. The program emphasizes the idea of viewing adversity as transient, localized, and manageable through one's own effort (Colvin & Taylor, 2012). Furthermore, MRT demonstrates how resilience requires the use of critical thinking, an understanding of

resilience in and of itself, and the skills needed to deal with challenges and bounce back (Colvin & Taylor, 2012). Adopting and modifying a resiliency program that fits the unique needs of inner city settings would be ideal to optimize the experience. However, resiliency training is something that could be expanded beyond urban school settings because the value of the training would have a positive effect on teachers across the board. In addition, policy/program development for teachers in preservice for college and alternate route programs would be a critical implication for policy.

### **Recommendations**

The findings of this study suggest that resiliency played a major factor in teacher retention in an urban setting. Although this study was limited to teachers in an urban setting, rural school settings also face persistent staffing challenges (Aragon, 2016). Thus, it would be advantageous to explore the influence of select personality traits and resiliency on teacher retention in a rural school district, which this study did not include. Future research studies could include interviewing teachers in a rural school district who have been in the field for 3 or more years to determine the influence of their level of resiliency on teacher retention. Moreover, future research could explore the impact of personality traits and resiliency on teacher retention as it relates to traditional versus alternate routes, grade levels, subjects, and demographics such as race, gender, or age.

Finally, future research could also explore the role played by specific personality traits such as conscientiousness and emotional stability in teacher performance or school attendance in an urban setting. It is imperative that future research be used to further expand the literature to discuss the importance of both personality traits and overall traits among the teachers hired by districts.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Informed Consent**

#### **1. Affiliation:**

My name is Kira Baskerville-Williams, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Education, Management, Leadership and Policy at Seton Hall University. A research study entitled *The Influence of Select Personality Traits and Resilience on Teacher Retention in an Urban School District* is being conducted.

#### **2. Purpose and Duration:**

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to investigate select personality traits and resilience of urban school district teachers by conducting interviews with teachers who have 3 or more years of teaching experience. This study will provide administrators with additional information to incorporate into their hiring practices to discern between teaching candidates who will be more likely to remain in settings common within urban school districts. The interview will be approximately 45 minutes in duration.

#### **3. Procedures:**

Nothing of an experimental nature will occur in this study. One-on-one interviews will be conducted. The researcher will be the sole interviewer for data collection for this study. Interview questions will focus on the specific areas of conscientiousness and resilience. The interview will take place at an offsite setting separate from the school building. The researcher will utilize office space that she currently rents which is located in an office building. Participants will be provided off-street parking and will be given directions to the office. The office is a private office so anonymity will be protected at all times. The participants will be provided with meeting times based on their availability.

#### **4. Instruments:**

A semi-structured one-on-one audio-taped interview will be conducted utilizing eight open-ended questions during a 45-minute interview. An example of an interview question is as follows: What prompted you to teach in urban education? The interview protocol will include a full description of the research questions to be asked, and follow-up probes to help participants expand on their answers. Participants will have an opportunity to review their interview transcription and make corrections if necessary.

#### **5. Voluntary:**

Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary. If you decide not to participate or to opt out of this study at any time, there will be no penalty.

#### **6. Anonymity:**

The interviews will be anonymous and pseudonyms will be used when naming participants, their schools, and the school district. Following the completion of the interview process, a professional transcriptionist will transcribe the interviews. Your name, school, and school district will not appear on any of the transcribed documents.

#### **7. Confidentiality:**

The researcher will obtain permission from the interviewees and ensure the audio recordings of the interviews are stored in a separate folder in which each interview will be assigned an identifying code. A digital recorder will be used to record all interviews and a digital voice recording application will be used as a backup.



**8. Storage of Records:**

All of this data will be stored on a flash drive in a locked file cabinet in a room to which only the research will have access for the next 3 years. At the end of 3 years, only the researcher will dispose of the data.

**9. Risks of Discomfort:**

There are no anticipated risks.

**10. Direct Benefits to Participants and Potential Benefits to Research:**

There are no direct benefits to participants in this study. Potential benefits to the body of research about teacher retention include the identification of personality traits and levels of resilience that may contribute to teacher retention in urban school districts.

**11. Remuneration:**

There will be no monetary benefits associated with this study.

**12. and 13. Compensation and Alternative Procedures:**

There are no risks associated with this study.

**14. Contact Information:**

Kira Baskerville-Williams, Principal Investigator  
Department of Education, Management, Leadership and Policy  
Seton Hall University  
Phone: University Phone Number 973 761-9668

Dr. Michael Kuchar, Faculty Advisor  
Seton Hall University  
Phone: Department Phone Number 201 566-4240

IRB Office: Seton Hall University, Presidents Hall, 3rd Floor  
Location: 400 South Orange Avenue, South Orange, NJ 07079  
Phone: 973 313-6314

**15. Written Permission:**

By signing this consent form, the participant agrees to participate in the interview as outlined above and further gives permission to be recorded. The participant, school, and school district will be identified by pseudonym. The interviewer and the transcriptionist will be the only persons with access to the tapes. The tapes and transcriptions will be stored on a flash drive and stored in a locking filing cabinet in a secure room and after 3 years will be destroyed.

**16. Signed Consent Form:**

After obtaining all necessary signatures, a copy of this consent form will be given to the participant.

Participant:

Date:

Principal Investigator:

Date:

## **Appendix B**

### **Letter of Solicitation**

#### **Affiliation:**

My name is Kira Baskerville-Williams and I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Education, Management, Leadership and Policy at Seton Hall University. I am conducting a research study entitled *The Influence of Select Personality Traits and Resilience on Teacher Retention in an Urban School District*.

#### **Purpose:**

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to investigate select personality traits and resilience of urban school district teachers by conducting interviews with teachers who have three or more years of teaching experience. This study will provide administrators with additional information to incorporate into their hiring practices to discern between teaching candidates who will be more likely to remain in settings common within urban school districts.

#### **Expected Duration:**

The interview will be approximately 45 minutes in duration.

#### **Procedures:**

Nothing of an experimental nature will occur in this study. I will be the sole interviewer for data collection as the data for this study. Interview questions will focus on the specific areas of conscientiousness and resilience. The interview will take place at an offsite setting separate from the school building. I will utilize office space that I currently rent which is located in an office building. Participants will be provided off street parking and will be given directions to

the office. The office is a private office so anonymity will be protected at all times. The participants will be provided with meeting times based on their availability.

**Instruments:**

A semi-structured one-on-one audio-taped interview will be conducted utilizing eight open-ended questions during a 45-minute interview. An example of an interview question is as follows: What prompted you to teach in urban education? The interview protocol will include a full description of the research questions, the questions to be asked, and follow-up probes to help participants expand on their answers. You will have an opportunity to review the transcription of your interview and make corrections if necessary.

**Voluntary:**

Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary.

**Anonymity:**

The interviews will be anonymous and pseudonyms will be used when naming participants, their schools, and the school district. Following the completion of the interview process, the interviews will be transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriptionist. Your name, school and school district will not appear on any of the transcribed documents.

**Security:**

I will obtain permission from the interviewees and ensure the audio recordings of the interviews are stored in a separate folder in which each interview will be assigned an identifying code. A digital recorder will be used to record all interviews and a digital voice recording application will be used as a backup. All of this data will be stored on a flash drive in a locked

file cabinet in a room to which only I have access for the next three years. At the end of three years, only I will dispose of the data.

## Appendix C

### Demographic Information Questionnaire

Thank you for your participation in this study, **The Influence of Select Personality Traits and Resilience on Teacher Retention in an Urban School District.**

In order to facilitate the interview, please fill out the following demographic questionnaire.  
Please Note: **Any identifiable information will be kept confidential.**

1. Name:
2. Email:
3. Age:
4. Race:
5. Nationality/Country of Origin:
6. Gender:
7. Marital Status: \_\_Single \_\_Partnered \_\_Married \_\_Widowed \_\_Separated \_\_Divorce
8. How many children are you raising or have you raised?
9. Please indicate your highest level of education
10. What certification process did you follow to become a teacher?  
\_\_\_\_ Standard  
\_\_\_\_ Alternate Route  
\_\_\_\_ Other (please specify):
11. What's your certification?
12. What grade level are you teaching?
13. Please indicate whether you are currently working in an urban school district (must be working within an urban school district to participate)
14. Please indicate your years of service in education:
15. Please indicate your years of service in your current school building:
16. Please indicate the subject that you teach?

## **Appendix D**

### **Interview Questions (Kira Baskerville)**

1. What prompted you to teach in urban education?
  - A. Were there any influences that may have prompted your entrance into urban education?
    - a. Who influenced you?
    - b. If they did, who and How did he/she influence you?
2. What have been some of the challenges that you have faced teaching in urban education?
  - A. As a result of these challenges, have you been tempted to exit urban education?
  - B. What made you stay in urban education?
  - C. How do you feel about remaining in urban education?
- 3: To what extent do you believe your personality has influenced your teacher retention?
  - A. Looking at this list of personality characteristics and its definitions, describe the personality characteristics that you feel you possess that have enabled you to stay in urban education.
  - B. Which personality characteristic do you value the most when teaching urban students?  
Why?
  - C. How has the personality characteristic conscientiousness helped or hindered your retention in urban education? In what ways?
- 4: Looking at the definition of resiliency How do you feel resilience has influenced your retention in urban education?
  - A. Why is it or is it not an important factor in teacher retention?
- 5: To what extent do you believe you are resilient?
  - A. How would describe your level of resiliency?

- B. How have you depended on your ability to be resilient in urban education?
  - C. Do you believe resilience is something that you have developed over time or that you were born with?
  - D. How was your resilience developed?
- 6: Which variable- resiliency, conscientiousness, or emotional stability, do you believe is more influential in your retention in urban education? Why?

### **TRAIT DEFINITIONS**

Resiliency: 1. The ability to temporarily adapt one's level of control up or down as the situation dictates. 2. The ability to bounce back in the face of adversity.

### **BIG FIVE**

Conscientiousness – Discipline, order, diligence, reliability.

Emotional Stability – Calm, not neurotic, not easily upset.

Extraversion – Talkative, assertive, energetic.

Agreeableness – Good-natured, cooperative, trustful.

Openness – Curiosity, Imaginativeness.



## Appendix E

### IRB Letter



March 27, 2019

Kira Baskerville-Williams

Dear Ms. Baskerville-Williams

The IRB is in receipt of the application for your research entitled "The Influence of Select Personality Traits and Resilience on Teacher Retention in an Urban School District."

Your Application does not fall under the purview of the IRB because, as you describe it in your Application, it is a non-generalizable case study.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mary F. Ruzicka, Ph.D." The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Mary F. Ruzicka, Ph.D.  
Professor  
Director, Institutional Review Board

Cc: Dr. Michael Kuchar