Perceptions of Teachers on Their Preparedness to Teach Students in Low-Income Urban Charter Schools in New Jersey

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Perceptions of Teachers on Their Preparedness to Teach Students in Low-Income Urban Charter Schools in New Jersey

by

Kimberly S. Wright

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Executive Doctorate in Education (Executive Ed.D.)
Department of Education Leadership Management & Policy
Seton Hall University
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Kimberly S. Wright, has successfully defended and made the required modifications to

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submit a copy with your final dissertation to be bound as page number two.
Abstract

This dissertation explores how novice teachers currently working in low-income urban charter schools in New Jersey perceive their specific preparation to work in a low-income urban charter school classroom, prior to doing so. In this qualitative study, a semistructured interview was used in an effort to assess the preparedness of 18 teachers based on their preservice training, administrative support and mentor guidance, and their self-efficacy and level of cultural awareness. The framework used for this study was Herzberg’s theory of motivation. Herzberg’s theory in combination with scholarly literature surrounding novice teachers in low-income urban classrooms produced success factors that measure teachers’ level of success in their roles. In previous research, teacher retention was said to be affected by the lack of these success factors.

Subjects were recruited from charter schools in three low-income urban areas in New Jersey. The interview instrument for this study was derived from literature surrounding novice teachers’ experiences with teaching in low-income urban classrooms.

This study addressed three research questions aimed at uncovering aspects of teacher preparation. The findings of this research indicate that most teachers did not receive preservice training specifically geared toward teaching in low-income urban charter schools in New Jersey. Findings also indicate that teachers felt supported by their administration. Teachers also reported that positive relationships with their mentors offered an additional layer of support in their roles, while the lack of that relationship did not offer extra support needed by novice teachers. This study also found that teacher retention was high, and teachers were committed to the success of their students. Teachers’ own success was directly connected to the success of their students. Teachers recommended that anyone seeking to work in a low-income urban charter school in New Jersey seek professional development opportunities consistently.

Keywords: Urban education, low socioeconomic schools, urban charter schools, low-income urban education, teacher-preparation programs
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To Dr. Seaton, thank you for encouraging me to pursue this goal back in graduate school. You saw something in me that I did not see in myself and always gave me the courage to “own it.” You have accomplished so much in your professional tenure but remain down to earth and true to who you are. I admire that and will follow your example.

To all of the low-income urban charter school teachers in New Jersey, the work that you do daily is appreciated, admired, and most of all not in vain. Our students need you, and we are grateful for the sacrifices that you make to be there for them. Keep focused, keep pushing, keep renewing yourselves, and keep your dreams for our students alive. WE will someday be the best.
Dedication

This work is dedicated to my sons, Jelani and Jaiden; the love of my life, Lashawn; my mom, Gwendolyn; my sisters, Kourtney, Krystina and Khyla; my nephew, Holt and my niece, Ahri. Without their support, I would not have had the courage to finish this work. Sometimes their support was strong and silent, and at other times it was loud and cheerful. There were even times when their support came in the form of my absence and subsequently in their patience waiting for my return. They picked up when I slacked off, and most of all they loved me through when I thought I had nothing left. There are no words, there is not enough time, and there are not enough ways, but I am so thankful, grateful, and enamored by your ability to love me unconditionally. I love you all more than I’d ever be able to express.

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This work is dedicated to the students that I have serviced throughout my career. I have chosen to immerse my strength and compassion in the low-income urban school community. I am continually in awe of how students can flourish, reinvigorate themselves, and smile through all that they face. They have taught me valuable life lessons that have changed who I am and the way I live. I am simply a support and a guide to whom they can look. Thank you for showing me what it truly means to shine.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Background

Research indicates that children from low-income urban households and communities develop academic skills slowly compared to many children from suburban groups (Morgan, Farkas, Hillemeier, & Maczuga, 2009). Students from these households commonly attend low-income schools. Low-income urban schools refer to city schools servicing low-income students, immigrant students, English language learners, and students of color (Quartz, 2012). These schools contend with issues such as safety, lack of materials, chronic tardiness/absence, behavioral challenges, physiological gaps, mental health shortcomings, negative outside influences, exposure to violence, and health issues American Psychological Association (APA, 2016). These issues create a deficit, which can prevent schools from adequately providing their students with a comprehensive educational experience (Roff, 2005). Recognizing the importance of skilled teachers addressing very diverse student needs, this qualitative study aims to examine teacher perceptions of their preparedness to work in low-income urban charter schools in New Jersey.

It stands to reason that the teachers who work in these low-income urban charter schools in New Jersey should adequately prepare to address the needs of students who face academic deficits. However, low-income urban schools tend to have few well-prepared teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1995). Studies show that teachers who work in low-income urban areas are paid less and are not trained as adequately as their suburban
Some research suggests that even when teachers do feel prepared to teach in low-income urban settings they still have little confidence in their ability to teach in culturally and linguistically diverse environments (Siwatu, 2007, 2011; Taylor & Sobel, 2001). Preparing teachers for the diversity of the students and experiences they may encounter is paramount to their levels of professional success (Quartz, 2012).

In the low-income urban areas of New Jersey, charter schools aim to fill the achievement gap that exists in many traditional public schools. Lipman (2013) conceptualized this by highlighting the rift between charter schools and traditional public schools. This rift partially signifies how both school types are vying for the best type of school to meet students’ needs. Ladson-Billings (2012) and Lipman (2013) state that there is now cause to reexamine the definition of low-income urban schools and force a look at charter, private, parochial, magnet, and special admission schools within the urban schooling landscape. Charter schools specifically have become known as a way to revitalize schooling by offering teachers and families an escape from the business as usual of the traditional public school bureaucracy (Brouillette, 2002; Cookson & Berger, 2002; Nathan, 1996; Rofes & Stulberg, 2004; Weil, 2000).

According to the U.S. Department of Education’s Report on Charter School Performance in New Jersey, the charter schools aim specifically to improve student-learning outcomes by focusing on innovative learning (USDOE, 2013). Charter schools were first established in 1992 to allow for their teachers to have autonomy and accountability in order to help achieve those improved student outcomes (Renzulli L. A.,
Parrott, H. M., & Beattie, I. R., 2010). With over 41,000 students enrolled and a growth rate of 27% each year in New Jersey charter schools (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS, 2015), newer teachers are choosing to work in charter schools. The schools claim to offer freedom, flexibility, and smaller classes (Young, V., Humphrey, D., Wang, H., Bosetti, K., Cassidy, L., Wechsler, M., et al., 2009), and, as a result, proponents of charter schools believe they are radically more effective than the traditional low-income urban public school (Mcdermott, P., Rothenberg, J. J., & Baker, K., 2006).

According to the NAPCS Annual Report (2015), the following is true of charter schools as of 2015: The movement began 25 years ago and has a 100% growth rate, while there was an $80 million increase in funding this past year, there is still a constant struggle to keep funding consistent. There are over one million students on the waiting list for various charter schools, and teacher recruitment continues to increase. While all of these are important developments, the quality of the teacher continues to be a struggle (NAPCS, 2015). This issue is prevalent regardless of the type of school low-income urban students attend (NAPCS, 2015).

The research on teachers in low-income urban schools indicates that there are measurements used to gauge teachers’ perceptions of their preparedness to teach in those schools. Experience in preservice preparation programs, student success as it relates to administrative support, and self-efficacy with cultural awareness are the most prevalent. Each component is a part of a teacher’s perception of preparedness, and combined they are key in predicting future success and longevity in the job. Depending on what experience a teacher has with regard to these measures, it may impact whether teachers
stay at their school or even in the profession as a whole (Silva-Mangiante, 2010). Inexperienced teachers in low-income urban schools are more apt to leave than their suburban peers (Quartz, 2012).

It was most recently found in a longitudinal study, conducted by the U.S. Department of Education, where the same group of teachers was followed for 4 consecutive years that 17% of all new teachers leave within the first 5 years (U.S. DOE, 2015). According to Segun Eubanks, Director for Teacher Quality at the National Education Association 1996, teachers who spend their first year in low-income urban schools are more likely to leave than those who do not. Some researchers believe the decision to leave the profession altogether is rooted in teacher’s feelings of self-doubt or doubt in their ability to be successful in the teaching field comprehensively (Fives, H., Hamman, D., & Olivarez, A., 2007; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007).

Three dominant themes emerged from the literature: preservice teacher training programs, student success as it relates to administrative support and self-efficacy with cultural awareness. Milner (2008) states, that both preservice teacher courses and experiences are crucial to the growth of knowledge, conceptual understanding, and practical understanding of classrooms in low-income urban schools. However, research shows that in some cases there is a gap between theory learned in preservice programs and practice in the classroom (Barnes, 2006). Teacher preparation programs have historically not directly focused on the challenges and possibilities of preservice teacher education both for and in low-income urban schools (Milner & Howard, 2013). Research further highlighted that aspects of the programs were working, and others needed to be reexamined. Regardless of whether a teacher was trained in a program that was front
loaded with theory or like the programs in which Jeannie Oakes and Martin Lipton teach using a social justice lens (Quartz, 2012), the perception of teacher preparedness invariably depended on the teachers’ specific background experiences.

The second reoccurring theme in the research conducted in this study centers on the level of student success in the classroom as it relates to the support a teacher receives from administration. Melinda George of the National Commission on Teaching America’s Future (NCTAF) in a recent report entitled What Matters Now: A New Compact for Teaching and Learning states, for a while, multiple districts and states have not given teachers the proper support that they need to be successful with every student, NCTAF, 2016). Furthermore, Burkhauser states that the building principal specifically can have influence on teachers’ perceptions of their success in the role by providing more academic support, professional development, career advancement opportunities, and moral support (2016). Specifically, teachers in low-income urban schools who did not receive appropriate administrative support did not gain the expertise needed to help students reach their optimal academic levels (Bancroft, 2008). Novice teachers also need experienced mentors to improve. They need a professional who can model and provide feedback consistently (Bancroft, 2008).

A teacher’s perception on being prepared for low-income urban schools is connected to how much students learn. When there are higher failure rates for students academically, as opposed to that failure being attributed to the negative experiences students had in other schools or classes (Mcdermott, et al., 2006), teachers may subscribe to what Mueller and O’Connor (2007) call deficit thinking. This type of thinking is the act of equating student success to perceived shortcomings attached to negative values
such as not caring or students not being capable of performing to standard. As a result, teacher job dissatisfaction and turnover are associated with those negative student performance data (Renzulli, et al., 2010). Teachers’ feelings on preparation increases when that teacher believes students are competent and can achieve excellence (Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Peterson, 1991). Students are the most important asset in low-income urban schools; with that said, research supports the need for further examination on how teachers perceive their overall preparation for teaching in low-income urban schools.

The third reoccurring theme in the research conducted in this study, self-efficacy, is defined as a person’s judgment of his or her capabilities to perform a particular task. Self-efficacy statements are commonly preceded with statements such as “I can” or “I cannot” (Bandura, 1977). Most preservice teachers do not have personal or educational experiences with low-income urban schools or their students (Jacobs, 2015); therefore, the concept of teaching in a low-income urban school is often conceptualized in a negative way by inexperienced teachers (Jacobs, 2015). Several researchers agree that preservice teachers base their self-efficacy on their field experiences, which often take place in classrooms that are not reflective of the low-income urban school (Ross, 1998). This, thereby, causes a level of shock when novice teachers are faced with the challenges of the low-income urban classroom (Sleeter, 2001). Bandura (1977), in the foundation of the self-efficacy theory, found that self-efficacy is a powerful predictor of future behavior. Love thinks that learning from students is as important as teaching them and successful preparation teaches preservice staff to acknowledge that (Love, A., & Kruger, A. C., 2005).
A specific aspect of self-efficacy, sociocultural awareness, emerged during the literature search for this study. Sociocultural awareness is defined as the identification, acceptance, and affirmation of one’s own and other people’s cultural identity (Gay, 1995; Sachs, 2004). Cultural awareness is very important in the success of teachers in low-income urban schools (Sachs, 2004). If a teacher is invested in this awareness, it presents itself as respect for and belief in all students (Haberman, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Zeichner, 1996). Once teachers are culturally aware, they can obtain success by framing their teaching through a culturally responsive lens. Using cultural knowledge, references, performance styles, and individual experience, teachers may connect to students to help make learning relevant (Gay, 2000; Siwatu, 2011). Conversely, teachers who are not prepared with cultural awareness are increasingly not as successful in low-income urban schools. The task of this preparation was labeled “daunting” by Gay (2002) and Villegas (2008).

Problem Statement

Research has started to uncover preservice teachers’ perceptions of their preparation to teach in the traditional public school setting. For example, in one such study of first-year teachers, one teacher said, “I feel like I would need more training… I don’t feel like I’ve had enough” (Bauml, M., Castro, A. J., Field, S. L., & Morowski, D. L., p. 13, 2013). This particular teacher was working in the traditional public school setting. Neither this study nor others addressed charter school teachers in New Jersey specifically. The teachers in Espinor’s (2014) study also attended preparation programs that have largely had the same required coursework and field observations over the past several years, which were designed to be successful in preparing teachers to work
anywhere. The reality is that the design of the programs is aligned to teachers who will largely work in traditional public school settings (Bauml et al., 2013; Ngai, 2004).

Researchers have not provided ample insight regarding how administrative support in relation to student success impacts charter schools specifically. Significant relationships with school administrators have been found to be a necessary resource for new teachers in general (Huisman, S., Singer, N. R., & Catapano, S., 2010). Even though the type of school and its specific context may be different, there are two primary implications for teachers. Teachers need proper preparation for their task, and there needs to be a strong system of support in place to assist novice teachers with the challenges of the job (Siwatu, 2011).

Researchers to date also have not specifically examined how a charter school teacher’s self-efficacy lends itself to success in the classroom. Charter schools boast of autonomy that is unmatched in the typical public school. However, due to the emergence of many charter schools simultaneously, there is not much data to insure the accuracy of that statement (Renzulli et al., 2010). If self-efficacy is proven to be a critical predictor of teacher success when working in low-income urban schools, then measuring its presence in low-income urban charter schools should also be a part of the research. Despite being more satisfied with their jobs, research is starting to show that charter school teachers are leaving the profession at higher levels than traditional public school teachers (Renzulli et al., 2010).

What was also lacking in the research was how cultural awareness specifically affects charter school teachers in New Jersey. Cultural awareness is one key determining factor in a teacher’s preparation perceptions in relation to success. Research states that
culturally responsive teachers need to be prepared to teach in diverse school settings, and it acknowledges the gravity of such attempts to prepare teachers (Gay, 2002; Villegas, 2008). Research does not, however, discuss the effect that the particular school type may have on such preparation. (Bauml et al., 2013; Ngai, 2004) directly stated, “We have yet to locate a study that investigates the challenges and barriers prospective teachers perceive about urban school teaching” (p. 14). Many teachers are not as culturally aware as they should be to be successful in low-income urban classrooms. In one study, the findings indicated that teachers automatically adjusted their perceptions based on a student’s social status (Castro, 2010).

Prior research largely supports the view that novice teachers are not prepared to teach in low-income urban schools. However, studies did not fully address whether teacher success and preparation perceptions were related to the type of schools in which teachers taught (i.e., charter, parochial, private, etc.). Furthermore, the prevailing research did not address whether teacher longevity in low-income charter schools relates to teacher preparation. In the 2014-2015 school year almost 500 new charter schools opened; 87 of these were located in New Jersey (NAPCS, 2015). The majority of the charter schools were opened in underserved communities. Charter school advocates believe they are a radical and effective alternative to public urban education (Andrews & Rothman 2002; Manno, B.V., Finn, C. E., Jr., Vanourek, G., Bierlein, L. A., 1998; Mcdermott et al., 2006; Sarason, 1998). Due in part to this belief, charter schools are opening in low-income urban areas exponentially.

Overall, there is a lack of qualitative research studies on how the factors that evaluate success of novice teachers, as stated previously, influence charter school
teachers’ perceptions on how prepared they were to teach in low-income urban environments, specifically charter schools in New Jersey. This existing gap in literature needs to be addressed and examined due to the role charter schools and their teachers play in the education of low-income urban students. According to Creswell (2009), qualitative researchers attempt to capture human experiences by talking to participants and outlining their perspectives. Since the perceptions of teachers who work in these schools are being examined, this study took a qualitative approach to fill the gap in the literature on low-income urban charter schools. The problem statement that determined the design for this dissertation is as stated above.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of charter school teachers regarding their feelings about their preparedness to teach in low-income urban schools. This study explored whether, and in what ways, the preparation for teaching in low-income urban charter schools was sufficient or was not sufficient with regard to teachers’ feelings on their level of success and longevity in the field. The focus of the participants of this study is low-income urban charter school teachers because the majority of the prior research was done in the low-income urban traditional public school setting. With the rapid expansion of charter schools occurring in low-income urban areas, it is necessary to expand empirical research on teacher preparation.

**Research Questions**

Three questions directed this study toward a deeper understanding of charter school teachers. These questions explored teachers’ feelings and reflections on working
in low-income urban charter schools in New Jersey. The specific questions are designed to allow for an examination of teachers’ viewpoints.

The research questions addressed in this study are as follows:

1. How, if at all, did teacher preservice training prepare teachers to teach in a low-income urban charter school in New Jersey?

2. How, if at all, did administrators support new teachers in a low-income charter school and help them acclimate into their respective school culture and climate?

3. Based on experience, what suggestions would teachers have for other teachers coming into the profession to teach in low-income urban charter schools in New Jersey?

**Overview of Methods**

Qualitative studies are used to determine the quality as opposed to the quantity of a subject (Creswell, 2009). In this study, the perceived quality of teacher preparation is being examined for the purpose of examining whether teachers felt prepared to teach in low-income urban charter schools in New Jersey. It will then be seen if success factors for novice teachers, as determined by research or other factors as they present themselves, were helpful in teachers feeling prepared to teach. According to Weiss (1995), by conducting interviews, we gain insight into people’s thoughts and perceptions, as well as and how they interpret both. As a result, we learn how certain events made them feel. This, therefore, may connect to how those perceptions led teachers to their outlook on the teaching profession and how it may or may not relate to longevity in the field. This will be a qualitative study conducted in northern and central New Jersey using a convenience sample to conduct semistructured interviews of 18 teachers.
The three charter schools selected for this study are in low-income urban areas and service grades K–8. A low-income urban school is one where more than half of the school population receives free or reduced lunch. Additionally, the schools chosen for the study are based on a convenience sample derived from cohort and professor recommendations. Principals and CEOs were contacted in writing to obtain written permission to conduct the study. Once approval to conduct this study was obtained, the principals identified teachers who met the criteria for the study. Teachers must have 6 or less years of teaching experience. A recruitment instrument was developed to highlight the purpose of the study. The instrument and invitation letter was sent, via email, to the charter school principals for approval. After which, the instrument and invitation letter was sent to the charter school teacher via email. When the participants self-selected to participate in the study, they were sorted by school. Then, 18 teachers were chosen to participate based on years in the field, years at their school, as well as a mix of genders and cultures. A request for demographic data was included in this letter to be used upon data collection.

The interview protocol focused on how prepared teachers felt to teach in low-income urban charter schools in New Jersey. The questions were derived from a thorough examination of the existing literature. Three veteran charter school teachers reviewed the questions for validity prior to conducting the interviews. I then refined the questions after feedback, as needed, to ensure research validity and question reliability. After interviews were conducted, audio recordings were transcribed and emailed to recipients to ensure validity. The transcriptions were coded using a software product called Rev.com. Upon return of the transcriptions I cross-checked theory with research
and data to develop coded themes in the data. Common themes allowed for descriptive narratives and produced perceptions as told by the teachers themselves.

**Conceptual Framework**

When I began searching for an applicable theoretical lens through which to conduct this study, I had difficulty finding a theory that focused on what perception of preparedness needed to be measured against. Teachers’ feelings on how prepared they were to teach in low-income urban environments ultimately had to be based on some level of success or the lack thereof. In broadening the lens, I realized that the theory that would apply best had to involve job satisfaction or dissatisfaction as it relates to teacher perception.

Krumboltz (as cited in Brown, 2002) explained that the value of a good theory is to draw a “map” of a particular reality. Originally, I chose Carl Rogers’s theory of self, otherwise known as the person-centered approach, to examine teachers’ self-perceptions prior to choosing a career path. Rogers’s theory discussed the importance of who we are and how that helps to shape our choices as professionals, thereby influencing feelings of success or the lack thereof (Rogers, 1959). While this theory was related to teacher perceptions, there was still a void when it came to whether teachers’ preparation influenced their level of motivation; therefore, influencing their self-perceptions on how prepared they were to teach.

The void was filled by Herzberg’s behavioral-based theory of motivation. As the name would imply, Herzberg’s theory claims that there are certain factors in the workplace that cause job satisfaction, while a separate set of factors cause job dissatisfaction. They are also each separately known as hygiene and motivators.
(Herzberg F., Mausner, B., Snyderman, B., 1959). Hygiene topics, which are related to an employee’s environment, can only dissatisfy if they are absent or not handled properly. Hygiene topics include company policies, supervision, salary, interpersonal relations, and working conditions. Motivators, on the other hand, create satisfaction by fulfilling individuals' needs for meaning and personal growth. Achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, and advancement are all examples. Once the hygiene areas are addressed, the motivators will promote job satisfaction and encourage production (Herzberg et al., 1959).

The application of Herzberg’s theory will be elaborated on in Chapter 2. Although it is unlikely that any theory can perfectly serve the specific questions of any study, the introduction of motivators into career choice offers an invaluable construct around which to formulate questions and interpret results. Creswell (2009) pointed out that theory could serve qualitative inquiry in much the same way that it serves the quantitative world. Understanding what teacher motivators are and where they came from may represent the beginnings of additional research to be done on charter school teachers specifically.

**Significance of the Study**

Students in low-income urban areas are underperforming; therefore, they are unable to compete with other students their ages around the United States and abroad (Quartz, 2012). If the purpose of educating students is so they can be productive members of society, then it is necessary they receive optimal learning experiences. The likelihood that low-income urban students will receive a sub-par education is higher than most other students (Haberman, 2005). This can produce citizens that may not be driven
to the levels of success that are possible. What might we be gaining, as a society, if we provided the type of education that should be expected, regardless of student’s socioeconomic status?

Research conducted by Martin Haberman (2005), Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994), Linda Darling-Hammond (1995), Albert Bandura (1977), and Geneva Gay (2000) all support the claim that newer teachers are not prepared to teach in low-income urban traditional public schools. However, there are not enumerable studies on charter school teachers and even more specifically charter school teachers in New Jersey. This study seeks to narrow the scope of school type while identifying the importance of such research due to the rise of the charter schools in low-income urban areas. This study could have implications that help to effectively prepare teachers to work in low-income urban charter schools, thereby increasing longevity in the field of education. Consistency of staff has been known to increase productivity in student learning (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

**Limitations of the Study**

The limitations of this study are:

1. The sample size of this study is small. Although this decision was made purposely, the study cannot be generalized to all charter school teachers in low-income urban areas in New Jersey or elsewhere.

2. The interviews were conducted in person and over the phone. I do not know the subjects personally, so it may limit the depth of their answers about their perceptions due to their level of comfort in sharing their experiences.
3. Personal bias: Although the intention is to conduct research without bias, as humans our personal and background experiences make us naturally biased. There is a degree of bias associated with this study as evidenced by the need to conduct the study in general. After my experience working as an administrator in a public charter school, I was of the belief that newer teachers, in general, are not prepared to teach in low-income urban charter schools. This belief came about specifically with regard to the teacher’s level of ability to address behavioral issues and use effective classroom management strategies.

**Delimitations of the Study**

The delimitations of this study are:

1. The data from this study were taken from interviews with elementary charter school teachers in New Jersey. Traditional public school teachers and high school charter school teachers in New Jersey were intentionally eliminated from the subject pool.

2. Subjects were limited to three elementary charter schools in New Jersey: two in northern New Jersey and one in central New Jersey. This selection limits the ability to make generalizations about charter school teachers in other areas of the state and country.

3. Teachers who were trained via a nonprofit teacher recruitment organization such as Teach for America were eliminated from participating in this study. Their training is considered more “on the job” as opposed to traditional preparation. Their perspectives would alter the focus of the study.
4. The study was limited to teachers who had 6 or less years of experience in teaching at a low-income urban charter school.

5. Schools were selected on the basis of District Grouping Factor (DGF).

Summary

Chapter 1 of this dissertation outlined the need for a look into charter school teacher perceptions of their preparation to teach in low-income urban charter schools. This fact gained relevance for me when I worked at a low-income urban charter school as a dean of students. Due to the frequency of incidents, I began to document the increasing number of less experienced teachers sending their students to my office when they were struggling with how to resolve their classroom issues. There is a lack of research delving into charter school teacher perceptions on their preparation due to the relative newness of the charter school itself. The majority of research focuses on the traditional public school teacher and setting. The research questions guide this study as well as connect it to the theory on which the study is built. Limitations, delimitations, definitions of terms, and methods were all outlined to reinforce the need for the research. Chapter 2 reviews the literature and provides a historical context surrounding the topic.

Definition of Terms

*Charter school* is a tax-supported school established by a charter between a granting body (as a school board) and an outside group (as of teachers and parents), which operates the school without most local and state educational regulations so as to achieve set goals.

*Low-Income urban* refers to an individual's or group's position within a hierarchical
social structure. Socioeconomic status depends on a combination of variables including occupation, education, income, wealth, and place of residence. Sociologists often use socioeconomic status as a means of predicting behavior.

*Traditional public schools* are schools or institutions controlled and operated by publicly elected or appointed officials and deriving their primary support from public funds.

*No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* is a 2001 law that revised and upgraded standards for public school education.

*Title I*: The basic principle of the Title 1 law is that schools with large concentrations of low-income students will receive supplemental funds to assist in meeting students’ educational goals.

*Preservice teacher programs* are education programs that prepare student teachers before they have undertaken any teaching for the multiple roles of classroom teacher, school team member, community leader, and education advocate.

*District Factor Group* refers to New Jersey’s system of classifying school districts by relative socioeconomic status.

*Culture and climate* describes the way a school environment operates and how that affects the teaching staff, students, and all involved.

*Alternate route* denotes the process for a person to obtain a teaching license without that teacher having completed a traditional preservice teacher program.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

To establish a context for this research, it is important to provide a thorough analysis of the current literature surrounding the preparation level of teachers to work in low-income urban charter schools. The majority of the prevailing literature that is available focuses on the traditional public school; however, it will be used as a basis with which to craft this inquiry. This will lay the foundation for a study of the careers of 18 charter school teachers in New Jersey who are currently teaching in low-income urban charter schools. The research provided does not support that there is one answer to what teachers need to be successful in low-income urban charter schools. However, the work of researchers Albert Bandura on self-efficacy, Gloria Ladson-Billings and Geneva Gay on cultural awareness, Linda Darling-Hammond and Martin Haberman on preservice teacher preparation, and Ladson-Billings on student success outcomes are widely recognized as the factors that determine the level of teacher success in the low-income urban traditional public school classroom.

With regard to teacher success it is possible that factors that lend themselves to feelings of success and job satisfaction affect teachers’ perceptions of their preparedness (Haberman, 2005). Some researchers have even gone so far as to create a new theory to help analyze teachers’ perceptions of success. Positioning theory, as developed by Bullough in 2005, discussed three theoretical frameworks that can be used to evaluate teacher success. As noted previously, this theory was based on the experiences of the traditional public school teacher. There is no connection to, or mention of, how this
theory would be applied to a charter school teacher in New Jersey or anywhere else. Feelings of success matter in all low-income urban school types, especially charter schools, which continue to gain relevancy in those areas.

While reviewing the relevant research for this study, three themes repeatedly emerged as measures used to gauge teacher perceptions of success in low-income urban traditional public schools. Preservice teacher programs, student success outcomes as they relate to the support teachers receive from administrators and self-efficacy with cultural awareness were all prevalent in studies and research. While each component plays its own separate role, they all ultimately intertwine when examining individual teachers’ levels of success in the low-income urban classroom. According to Silva-Mangiante (2010), gathering information from multiple measures of evaluation assists in identifying effective and ineffective teachers. This matters when making decisions about making sure more effective teachers work in low-income urban charter schools.

The first reoccurring theme to emerge was the amount of preparation teachers received from their preservice teacher preparation. The preparation of teachers in general is said to have a direct link to the success of a teacher in the profession and the length that a teacher may remain in the profession (Darling-Hammond, 2005). The depth to which teachers are prepared prior to teaching and the professional development efforts while in the profession matters as well. John Dewey (1904/1965) stated that teacher education placed more focus on the students being readily proficient as opposed to teachers being continual students of education itself. This has stifled the preparation of students and teachers and inhibited their growth. Dewey stated:

Practical work should be pursued primarily with reference to its reaction upon the
professional pupil, making him a thoughtful and alert student of education rather than to help him get immediate proficiency. For immediate skill may be got at a cost of power to go on growing. Unless a teacher is...a student of education he may continue to improve in the mechanics of school management, but he cannot grow as a teacher, an inspirer and director of soul-life. (p. 151)

Professional development provides an opportunity to grow as a teacher and contributes to success in the classroom. Professional development allows for teachers to share and put new ideas into practice on their own (Huisman et al., 2010). A commitment to lifelong learning is what is needed to reform classroom practice and create a novice teacher who is able to be most successful in the classroom. Furthermore, teachers who pursue their own professional development opportunities fosters the resiliency needed to continually work toward success (Huisman et al., 2010). Seeking professional development weaves into problem-solving and continues to build the foundation for resiliency by positioning the teacher for success (Bullough, 2005; Harré & van Langenhove, 1999).

Currently, research shows that in order for teacher preparation to be most successful, an in-depth look into effective teaching must be done as well as what is the best method of making teachers effective in practicality (Monk, 2015). Teacher programs, on the whole, need to be examined to find out what makes a useful teacher-preparation program. In order to analyze these programs, there must be a guideline that is able to measure all aspects of preparation and how those aspects manifest in practice. With specific regard to low-income urban areas, the difficulty lies in finding measures and practice that work. Some practices may work in higher socioeconomic areas;
therefore, they cannot be generalized as effective teacher practice (Monk, 2015).

Regardless of where a teacher works, traditional-route candidates attend a college that offers education as a major, and as undergraduates they have clinical experiences, which start with courses and culminate with clinical practice. In New Jersey, students must have at least 50 hours of clinical experience before beginning clinical practice. The placement is in two different classrooms; one is a classroom servicing students with disabilities (Changes to Traditional Route/CEAS Educator Preparation, 2015). Candidates must have 60 hours of general education classes and 30 hours that are specific to their major with the culmination of a clinical teaching experience. To obtain a certificate of eligibility, which allows a candidate to enter the classroom, the state of New Jersey requires a 3.0 average GPA for cohort candidates or a GPA of 2.75 or higher for individuals. Candidates must pass commissioner-approved basic skills assessment of Math and Language Arts. Candidates must also pass a commissioner-approved performance-based assessment (Changes to Traditional Route/CEAS Educator Preparation, 2015).

An article written by Darling-Hammond L., Chung, R., & Frelow, F. (2002) summarizes the results of a study conducted by New Visions for Public Schools, a nonprofit organization in New York City, and the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future’s Urban Initiative in the spring of 1998 (Imbimbo & Silvernail, 1999). The study compared teachers who enter the workforce from traditional preservice teacher programs, accelerated teacher- preparation programs, or alternate-route programs. Surveys were sent out to teachers who had 4 years or less of experience. Teachers were asked to rate their preparedness, their personal views on teaching, and their intentions for
remaining in a teaching profession.

Overall, the study found that teachers who entered the profession from a method other than a traditional preservice teaching program felt less prepared than their counterparts. It was also found that there was not necessarily a direct link between how teachers felt about their own preparation and their actual effectiveness in the classroom. Darling-Hammond (2005) believes that there are several programs aimed at improving the quality of teaching and attraction to the profession; however, the most important factor that needs to be focused on is for states to invest in the talent that they currently have. Of the three measures of teaching success that are identified in the literature, it is crucial to evaluate what connection there is to teacher retention.

The second theme that emerged from the research was the level of student success in the classroom. The most successful teachers have the belief that all students can succeed; they immersed themselves in their classroom community and truly believed in learning in a reciprocal capacity between students and teachers (Ladson-Billings, 1994). On the other hand, when teachers expect students in low-income urban communities to come prepared with an appropriate grade level content knowledge, these teachers became frustrated and showed indications of not being able to accomplish their task (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Love et al., 2007). The level of support a teacher receives from colleagues, mentors, and administrators affects how they perceive their levels of success personally as transmitted to the students (Bondy, E., Ross, D.D., Gallingane, C., & Hambacher, E., 2007).

Mueller and O’Connor (2007) coined the phrase *deficit thinking* a term that describes the ways in which teachers who subscribe to this type of thinking inadvertently
lower levels of their students’ successes. Deficit thinking is the act of relating to students based on preconceived notions and shortcomings that are negative and render students unable to accomplish academic tasks. Milner (2010) believes that deficit thinking can be turned around into a positive situation where teachers can use positive thoughts to lead students to success in the classroom. He believes that showing preservice teachers how to identify their own deficit thinking and unpacking the concept can help raise student success levels. In one study of a new charter school, those positive thoughts produced positive outcomes. For example, accepting student diversity and perceived parental ability and individualized instruction resulted in an overall growth of student achievement (Downing, J. E., Spencer, S. & Cavallaro, C., 2004).

Administrative support in combination with a teacher’s mentoring experience can have a direct link to a teacher’s experience in a low-income urban school and thereby affect student success outcomes. Teachers equate their lack of success to minimal support from the principal and school administrators (Bullough, 2005). A positive mentoring relationship or the absence of an effective mentorship experience can affect teachers’ perceptions on their ability to be successful for both themselves and their students. In one case study, Bullough (2005) noted two preservice teachers who were simultaneously assigned to the same mentor. One teacher was ultimately successful, and the other struggled especially with classroom management. The difference between the two was how the teachers perceived the role of the mentor and implemented what was suggested. Additionally, the role of the principal can directly influence a teacher’s perception of the job (Iasevoli, 2016). Principals can directly influence a teacher’s experience by focusing on working conditions. This specifically means offering more
support and professional growth. These all ultimately affect student success outcomes being that the teacher’s success is related to their students’ success (Iasevoli, 2016).

The final of the success factors to emerge was self-efficacy. As defined by Bandura (1977), self-efficacy is a person’s belief in their own capabilities, and it is the precursor to how they put their knowledge and learned skills into action. The most effective low-income urban educators display a deep self-understanding that fosters an awareness of their biases, which serves to develop their values and beliefs and allows for personal growth (Gay, 1995; Guyton & Hildalgo, 1995). The most supportive teaching environments both increase student learning and a teacher’s self-efficacy. When teachers own the responsibility, and believe in their ability to increase student-learning outcomes, they are more successful in the low-income urban classroom (Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2004).

Bandura (1977) states that self-efficacy comes from four components: mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and psychological and emotional states. Mastery experiences give the novice teacher the responsibility of completing a specific task on their own, which serves to inform their ability to successfully complete the task as it reoccurs going forward. Vicarious experiences are ones where tasks are modeled for the educator, which allows for preservice teachers to observe teachers who are successful with low-income urban students. Verbal persuasion is when novice teachers receive positive verbal reinforcement from colleagues and administrators alike on a regular basis. This helps those teachers to develop a robust belief in their own abilities to accomplish the most difficult tasks (Bandura, 1997). Finally, the psychological and emotional state of a novice teacher can predict their ability to confront
the most difficult situations. One who panics or has an inverse physical reaction to pressure situations may have low self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997).

Along similar lines as the self-efficacy theory and connected to it is the success factor, cultural awareness. Researchers believe proper preparation of teachers who work in low-income urban schools starts with changing their multicultural outlooks, increasing their cultural knowledge, and giving them the tools they need teach successfully (Gay, 2002; Milner, 2009). Cultural awareness is defined as valuing, respecting, and developing an awareness of one’s own and others’ cultures (Ladson-Billings, 1994). This leads to culturally relevant teaching, which empowers students and respects their cultural knowledge and performance styles, resulting in a profound commitment to uplift minority students and their communities (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Culturally responsive teaching, according to Gay (2000), uses cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and frames of reference to make learning more culturally relevant and effective for low-income urban students.

As it stands, a large portion of the teachers preparing to enter classrooms today do not have many experiences in low-income urban environments. The middle-class predominantly Caucasian candidate pool has difficulty gaining the clarity that they need to teach effectively in multicultural schools (Sleeter, 2001). The small amount of cultural knowledge that these novice educators have thereby creates a disconnect between theory and practice as they work from primarily European constructs of pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2000). To counteract this issue, culturally responsive teachers must: (a) recognize their own ethnocentrism while understanding the larger sociopolitical context, (b) recognize that constructs of appropriate classroom etiquette are defined by culture, (c)
gain knowledge of their students’ cultural backgrounds, and (d) build caring classroom communities (Ladson-Billings, 1995). When cultural awareness is ignored, both low academic achievement and student disinterest occur (Irvine, 1990; Irvine & Armento, 1990).

**Overview of the Low-Income Urban Community**

A comprehensive review of literature on the topic of charter school teachers’ perceptions of their preparedness to teach in low-income urban schools must begin with an overview of the low-income urban community as a whole. Children living in low-income urban areas come often come from households that are defined as having a low socioeconomic status (SES). According to Dictionary.com (2016), socioeconomic status is defined as the measure of the influence that the social environment has on individuals, families, communities, and schools. Socioeconomic is closely related to social class; however, is different in that its purpose is to close disparities between those classes. Low SES refers to lower status in social class ranking. Children who are considered to have a low socioeconomic status come from low-income households. Low income is defined as those with incomes below the Federal Poverty Line (Census and American Community Survey Data, 2012).

Socioeconomic status classifications have a direct effect on children born into and/or raised in low-income urban areas. Children living in low-income urban areas have familial factors that have a direct negative correlation to their school experiences (Caine & Caine, 1991). To begin with, living in poverty is associated with risks that place students’ health and well-being in jeopardy such as limited access to health care and higher rates of victimization from crimes and violence. Immigrant families also have a
variety of needs—ranging from legal counsel, housing, and asylum to linguistic and cultural integration—that are sometimes neglected (Quartz, 2012).

Due to the challenges that many of these communities’ face, growing up in a family living in a low-income urban area can have a detrimental effect on a child’s social and emotional development (Davies, P. T., & Cummings, E. M., 1998). There may be weakened family and other relationships, lowered self-esteem, the tendency for aggression, as well as health problems. According to Davies et al., (1998), this may result in child and adolescent problems, such as poor school performance, poor peer relations, and behavior problems such as depression, hostility, and antisocial conduct. Although some low-income urban students come to school with these preexisting challenges, these students are still expected to perform on par with their peers.

The National Academy of Sciences conducted a study that found the earliest relationships and experiences, starting in infancy, matter more for development than has been understood previously (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). These relationships set the stage for three very important aspects of social and emotional development: (a) self-regulation, (b) how children feel about themselves, and (c) how children relate to other adults and peers. This includes both school and home, where children spend the majority of their time. These risk factors are often a foreshadowing of what can happen as a result of unsteady relationships and they include: poverty, low parental educational levels, single parenthood, non-English speaking parents, parental alcohol or drug abuse, depression, and exposure to domestic violence (Knitzer, 2003).

Due to some of these factors, as adults, parents can suffer from mental illness, which impacts children as well. Parental psychosocial risk factors, developmental delays,
symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder, difficult behaviors (extreme aggression & sadness), problems with peer and caregiver relationships (inability to trust), poor health, and later vulnerability to alcohol, tobacco, drugs, and substance abuse are all a result of lack of proper social and emotional growth (Knitzer, 2003).

All of these findings suggest that poor social and emotional development sets the stage for poor emotional, social, and behavioral competence in early childhood and predicts children's academic performance as early as the first grade as well as whether they will have to repeat kindergarten (Raver & Knitzer, 2002). This can begin the cycle of underperformance in low-income urban schools.

**Review of Methods**

The methods applied to acquire the literature for this review involved determining which key words would produce peer-reviewed data on the topic. Urban education, low socioeconomic schools, traditional public schools, low-income urban education, and teacher-preparation programs for urban teachers were all keywords used to conduct this research. The Seton Hall University and Google Scholar databases provided scholarly research of all key words. It became clear immediately that the terms socioeconomic, urban, and low-income were not synonymous when searching for articles. Each term generated different articles that were often outside the realm of this study. The keywords *low-income* and *urban*, when combined, provided the most relevant and accurate research for scholarly articles.

The initial results of the search yielded articles on traditional public schools and studies that had been conducted in various areas of the United States. The studies dated back to the 1970s and had been sometimes duplicated or chosen as a basis on which to
conduct further research. With this in mind, the initial articles were read by me and the cited pages were used to locate additional scholarly articles that either supported or did not support the research findings. These articles were also used as reference points to begin organizing common themes as found throughout the reading. It was while identifying these themes that the gap in the literature began to emerge.

Due to the lack of studies found on charter schools, additional searches using the keywords charter school, urban charter school, teaching in urban charter schools, and charter school teacher preparation were added to list. The articles generated from those searches were so few that it made the gap even more prevalent. Once all of the common themes had emerged, each section was coded to look for similar patterns, methods, and data. The coding allowed for the work of Albert Bandura, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Geneva Gay, Linda Darling-Hammond, and Martin Haberman to lead the charge of this study, with most of the studies either coming directly from them or cited by other researchers. While researchers are mentioned in this review, it stands to reason that the aforementioned scholars created a foundation for a large portion of this work.

Limitations of the Review

The limitations of this literature review include the very large gap of scholarly research on charter school teachers in the low-income urban settings in New Jersey. There were three articles that attempted to address aspects of charter school education in general. Bancroft (2008) wrote the SES of charter schools, Mcdermott et al., (2006), wrote about the lessons learned from a first-year urban charter school, and Wei, Patel, and Young, (2014) wrote about the organizational differences between charter schools and traditional public schools. Although there was relevant information in these articles,
it was not directly related to the topic of this study. This study highlighted that which has been underrepresented in scholarship.

**Theoretical Framework**

The success factors used to measure teachers’ level of success coupled with Herzberg’s theory of motivation helps the researcher gain insight with regard to the teachers’ perceptions of preparedness to teach in low-income urban charter schools. Herzberg’s theory states there are certain factors in the workplace that determine job satisfaction, while a another set of factors determine job dissatisfaction. The two parts of this theory are separately known as hygiene and motivators (Herzberg et al., 1959). Hygiene factors refer to an employee’s environment, and dissatisfaction occurs only if these elements are absent or not handled correctly. Hygiene factors include, but are not limited to, company policies, supervision, salary, interpersonal relations, and working conditions. Motivators, conversely, create satisfaction by fulfilling individuals' needs for meaning and personal growth. Achievement, recognition, the work, responsibility, and advancement are all examples. Once the hygiene areas are addressed District Grouping Factor, the motivators will promote job satisfaction and encourage production (Herzberg et al., 1959).

With specific focus on the traditional public school, hygiene factors that have plagued traditional low-income urban public school novice teachers are primarily reflected in interpersonal relations (Bullough, 2005; Willard-Holt, 2000; Quartz, 2012). Motivators such as achievement and recognition may not be immediate and may require a length of stay in the field prior to appearing on a regular basis, if at all. Shifting to observing how hygiene and motivators affect low-income urban charter school teachers
in New Jersey will begin to address the gap in research on this topic. The relevancy of what is found will allow for the discussion to continue on what needs to be done to adequately prepare future preservice and novice teachers.

**Traditional Low-Income Urban Public School Environment and Outcomes**

Research indicates that children from low-income urban households and communities develop academic skills more slowly compared to children from high-income suburban groups (Morgan et al., 2009). Initial academic skills are correlated with the home environment, where low literacy environments and chronic stress negatively affect a child’s pre-academic skills. The school systems in low-income urban communities are often under resourced, negatively affecting students’ academic progress (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008; American Psychological Association, 2014).

Families from low-income urban communities are less likely to have the financial resources or time availability to provide children with academic support. Children’s initial reading competence is correlated with the home literacy environment, number of books owned, and parent distress (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008). However, parents from low-income urban communities may be unable to afford resources such as books, computers, or tutors to create a positive literacy environment (Orr, 2003). In a nationwide study of American kindergarten children, 36% of parents in the lowest income areas read to their children on a daily basis, compared with 62% of parents from the highest income areas (Coley, 2002). When enrolled in a program that encouraged adult support, students from low-income urban groups reported higher levels of effort towards academics (American Psychological Association, 2014; Kaylor & Flores, 2007).
Increasing evidence supports the link between low-income urban communities and learning disabilities or other negative psychological outcomes that affect academic achievement. Children from low-income urban households are twice as likely as those from high-income households to display learning-related behavior problems. A mother’s socioeconomic status was also related to her child’s inattention, disinterest, and lack of cooperation in school (Morgan et al., 2009), perception of family economic stress and personal financial constraints affected emotional distress/depression in students and their academic outcomes (American Psychological Association, 2014; Mistry, Benner, Tan, & Kim, 2009).

It has been continually challenging for traditional public school teachers to properly educate low-income urban students with perpetual budgetary constraints. According to research conducted by Haberman (2005), the achievement gap between racial groups and economic classes continues to widen. The persistent shortage of teachers who can be effective in 120 failing low-income urban school systems guarantees that the miseducation of seven million diverse children in urban poverty will continue. Teachers working in low-income urban schools typically have fewer resources available to them and less control over their curriculum than teachers in other locations (Haberman, 2005).

The federal government recognized the need to help close the widening achievement gap of which Haberman and other researchers spoke. Title I was initially implemented as part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1965 (Weinstein, M.G., Stiefel, L., Schwartz, A. E., & Chalico, L., 2009). According to the U.S. Department of Education, the purpose of Title I is:
“To ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and state academic assessments” (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

Title I was put in place to help to rectify some of the inequities between high- and low-income urban school systems. The larger outcome, ideally, would be that all students genuinely receive the same education and therefore are prepared to be successful in society and compete with their peers equivocally, as stated in Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) law (Legal.com, 2016). No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law (Legal.com, 2016) further increased the accountability measures and added sanctions for schools failing to meet those measures (Weinstein et al., 2009).

Although Title I is the largest federal elementary and secondary education program, findings about its impact on student achievement have been mixed. Part of the problem has been that Title I is not a specific intervention that can be easily evaluated, but rather a significant funding stream with a large number of requirements that include such areas as teacher quality, comprehensive school reform, and curriculum and instruction (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2004). Various studies have continued to show less promising results. Two authoritative studies in the 1990s found that achievement gaps between disadvantaged and advantaged students were not reduced by Title I (Puma, 1993) and that Title I only achieves a small amount of benefits (Rotberg & Harvey, 1993). Although this study was conducted over 20 years ago, it stands to reason that its results are reflected in the state of today’s traditional public education.

How low-income urban schools use Title I funds can vary and may impact student
achievement. The Institute for Education and Social Policy at NYU conducted a study on the impact of Title I spending on some New York City schools. The results indicated that because Title I funds can be combined with other federal spending; it cannot always be determined exactly how the funds are being allocated. Therefore, it can be inferred that Title I funds do not directly increase achievement in low-income urban schools (Favero, N., Meier, K. J., 2013). Regardless, the purpose of the enactment of Title I was to help to decrease some inconsistencies and increase test scores for low-income urban schools, yet it cannot be said whether that is definitively occurring. Students in low-income urban schools are continuing to fall short, and this justifies need for teachers to be prepared as well as possible to address those students and supplement gaps in their academic experiences.

**Low-Income Urban Traditional Public Schools in New Jersey**

Low-income urban schools do not look the same across the country. The way these schools look in some districts in New Jersey is crucial to understanding what these schools have in common and what differs amongst them. Both the similarities and the differences trickle down to schools, their budgets, and ultimately the effect on their teachers and students. The recession in 2007–2009 impacted New Jersey’s overall state budget (Chakrabarti & Sutherland, 2010). Because some of school funding comes from the state, low-income urban schools were affected directly. New Jersey relies most heavily on tax income from business and property taxes in the state to supplement their budgets. That being the case, from 2007–2009 spending decreased across the states; therefore, budget gaps formed (Dietz, R., Haughwout A. F., & Steindel, C., 2010).

New Jersey is required to review its budgets as the fiscal year progresses to ensure
that they are balanced; however, the decrease in income during the 2007–2009 recession resulted in a need for New Jersey to spend more (Dietz et al., 2010). The direct impact on education was profound because two thirds of a state’s budget is allocated to education and social services. The state pays the salaries of its employees (including teachers), and funds social services that low-income families rely on for survival. During that time, it became increasingly difficult for states to spend more on education when such a huge budget pitfall was created (Dietz et al., 2010).

In New Jersey, most low-income urban school districts can be designated as either simply low-income or Abbott. According to the state of New Jersey Department of Education (2015), Abbott districts came about as a result of a court decision stating that the school funding formula was unconstitutional to poorer urban districts. It was determined that districts directly affected by this disparity would receive a different designation, which would allow for those districts to receive additional funding. If Abbott districts followed the remedy proposed by the decision, then they could eventually be removed from one of the 30 Abbott districts in the state at that time.

Students in low-income urban communities continue to struggle to reach the achievement of their high-income neighbors. While Abbott and other low-income urban districts in New Jersey are able to offer higher salaries to teachers due partially to the extra funding they receive for their designations, this incentive has done little to attract and retain effective highly qualified educators. As a result, students in the areas around the state of New Jersey are still the ones suffering the most, both in school and at home (Chakrabarti & Sutherland, 2010). The traditional public schools operate differently than
other types of schools; therefore, the need for other types of schools began to rise (Wei, Patel, & Young, 2014).

The Low-Income Urban Charter School Bloom

In examining the novice charter school teacher, it is best to first provide a background on the evolution of the charter school itself. Charter schools were established in 1992 in an attempt to bring back autonomy and ownership in the districts, schools, and classrooms of the United States (Renzulli et al., 2010). The goal was to provide a less structured and bureaucratic experience than the traditional public school. There are currently over 6,700 charter schools that service approximately 2.9 million students in the United States (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2010). In the just the 2014-2015 academic year, nearly 500 new charter schools opened with more than 200 closing over the entire time of the evolution.

Charter schools are said to force staff members and parents to become accountable for their schools. They also offer teachers a chance to be more autonomous, allowing for flexibility with hiring practices (Bancroft, 2008). The charter school evolution had a targeted focus on low-income urban areas, citing their method as being the best fit for change and growth compared to the methods of the traditional public school (right to the city). The teachers chosen to work in charter schools have different perceptions and backgrounds such as less experience, younger in age, and they graduated from more competitive colleges than the traditional public school teacher (Wei et al., 2014). Regardless of what the initial intent of the charter school design was, there is sometimes high turnover amongst the newer staff (Bancroft, 2008).
Teacher Retention

Preparing new teachers for the diversity of students and experiences they will find in low-income urban schools is crucial to their professional success (Quartz, 2012). While this is true, there are great challenges involved in teaching in these schools. Some challenges are the preparation, recruitment, and retention of the highly qualified teacher candidates. According to Fuhrman (2002), there were over 16,000 school districts in the United States in 2002. Close to one third of all students attended schools in 1.5% of these school districts; in other words, 31% of elementary and secondary students were concentrated in 226 large urban school districts. The statistics alone make it apparent as to why low-income urban schools have difficulty with recruiting (Espinor, 2014).

The National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future estimated that 3 million teachers were hired between 2000 and 2010. The majority of these were new teachers who served approximately 14 million diverse children in low-income urban areas (United States Department of Education, 2015). The phenomenon of these areas needing thousands of teachers surrounded by suburbs and small towns where there are hundreds of applicants for one position is well known (Haberman, 2005). The age of the urban teacher tends to be younger than 26, which impacts longevity in those districts. Of the 15% of teachers who are willing to apply to work in low socioeconomic school districts, only 1 in 10 under age 26 will stay long enough (3 years or longer) to become successful teachers in these schools (United States Department of Education, 2015).

What this means is that the approximately half million teachers under age 26 in over 1,200 traditional preservice programs of teacher education provide the 120 largest low-income urban school districts with about 1.5% of their annual teacher output.
(Haberman, 2005). As a result of the shortage of qualified individuals willing to teach in low-income urban areas, unfortunately, many districts still recruit and hire only the traditional pool. The traditional candidate is a middle class, White, monolingual, late adolescent female who graduated from suburban, small town, and parochial schools. They are full-time undergraduate majors in education, with little or no work or life experiences, without families or child-rearing experience, and they lack commitment or roots in the particular low-income urban area (Haberman, 2005).

As a direct result of the lack of options in the candidate pool, teacher burnout has risen. Rates of teacher burnout and turnover are higher in low-income urban schools (Kincheloe, 2004; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2004). This revolving door of teachers contributes to a negative working environment, making turnover both a cause and a result of low-income urban school dysfunction. Teacher turnover also undermines school improvement and teacher education initiatives that require a strong and stable professional culture (Quartz, 2012). For this reason, The New Teacher Project conducted a study on teacher turnover and its relationship to teacher retention.

The New Teacher Project sees the lack of teacher retention as a crisis, but even more specifically highlights that retaining any teacher is very different from retaining the right teachers. They refer to those teachers as “The Irreplaceables,” meaning the teachers that are nearly impossible to replace. Because their practice of engaging students is so successful, the student far exceeds others in comparison (The New Teacher Project, 2012). The article written by The New Teacher Project identifies three main reasons that teachers of the irreplaceable caliber leave low-income urban schools: (a) not enough is done to remove underperforming teachers, (b) the school cultures are not rich
enough, and (c) school leaders are not given the right amount of autonomy to make changes from the status quo (The New Teacher Project, 2012). In short, working in schools has become increasingly less desirable. This leaves the overall outlook on the profession as negative, and, as a result, few professionals are attracted to the teaching profession.

Summary

The scholarly literature reviewed in this chapter highlighted the criteria of success for low-income urban teachers in the classroom. These criteria consist of preservice training, the level of student success in the classroom as it relates to the support a teacher receives from administration, self-efficacy, and cultural awareness. Additionally it included: the landscape of the low-income urban families and communities, the effect of the low-income urban families and communities on children at home and in school, the financial structure of traditional New Jersey public schools, the influx of the low-income urban charter school, the theoretical framework that will be used to measure teacher motivational factors with regard to their work in low-income urban schools, teacher retention in low-income urban schools, and how these all have affected the low-income urban teachers and students at this point.

The literature provided analysis and studies that primarily focused on the traditional public school. The low-income urban charter school must be included in current and future research due to the impact it has had on the low-income urban landscape. Setting a child up for educational success in a low-income urban area requires attention, reframing, and a thorough evaluation on all levels. There are many facets of a child, and all of them need to be tended to and nurtured for a child to work toward higher
levels of academic achievement. There are factors that are beyond a child’s control and are left up to the adults that guide them to fill in the gaps. If the responsible and involved parties are not taking responsibility for their specific role in a child’s life, then they are allowing cracks in development that impede growth. When the extra energy that is given in a child’s world goes beyond self, the chances for an improved life increase.
Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of charter school teachers regarding their feelings about their preparedness to teach in low-income urban schools. This study served as an opportunity to provide a realistic view of how low-income urban charter school teachers in New Jersey gauge their preparation to teach in their respective schools. This chapter will discuss my interest in this topic and describe the methods that were used to conduct the research. Selections of participants as well as a profile of each were provided also. The last portion of this chapter explained the method of data collection and analysis and includes limitations of the methodology.

Background

At the time of this study I, the researcher, had been working in the field of education for over 18 years. I began my career as a middle-school grammar teacher in Hillside, New Jersey, in 1998. Hillside is bordered by Newark, New Jersey, and Irvington, New Jersey, both of which are classified as low-income urban school districts. As I began my teaching career, I realized that the majority of my students were lagging academically compared to students in suburban areas. I also found that I was spending a large amount of my time addressing negative behaviors and emotional deficits with my eighth grade students. As a novice teacher with no formal training in either area, I found the task to be daunting and exhausting. I soon realized that it was going to be extremely difficult to teach my students grammar, if I did not first find a streamlined way of
addressing their other needs. This realization was surprising because I had not learned how to attend to any of these deficits during my preservice teacher-preparation classes.

During the 2000-2001 school year, I decided that it was time for a change. I decided that in order to get a comprehensive teaching experience, I needed to see if suburban students were struggling with academic, emotional, and behavioral deficits like the low-income urban students I was teaching. I took a job in Bergenfield, New Jersey, as a seventh grade reading teacher with the high hopes of leaving the burdens of low-income urban education behind me. It was not long before I felt like teaching those suburban students was exactly what my preservice teacher-education program had focused on. My students in Bergenfield had little, if any, difficulty with academics, their emotions, or behavior. I found that my students were exactly where they were expected to be, and the challenge of constantly feeling as though I was behind and working reactively and futilely to catch my students up was gone. Instead, the feeling was replaced by boredom that led me to leave education altogether.

After a brief stint in human resources, I realized that the most fulfillment I had felt up until that point in my career came from working with low-income urban students. The work was indeed daunting, exhausting, reactive, and endless; however, I could not stop thinking about how helping those students had really developed a purpose in my life. It was with that epiphany that I left my comfortable corporate human resources job at Mercedes Benz to return to work in low-income urban education. I took a job at a middle school in Irvington, New Jersey, teaching seventh grade reading. Being that I had felt less prepared my first time working with low-income urban students, I levied what I had learned in order to arm myself for a better experience. With time and continuous
forethought and support, I began to become the type of teacher I had always seen myself becoming. My students continued to have their challenges; however, since my level of preparation had increased, so had my self-efficacy, cultural awareness, and ultimately my student success outcomes.

After leaving Irvington, New Jersey, I took a teaching job in Newark, New Jersey, that led me to want to become a school administrator. I wanted to reach more than just the students in my classroom, and being a school leader would allow me to do so. Upon completing my master’s degree in educational leadership, I was eager to obtain a job as a school leader. Because there were no opportunities in Newark at that time, I began to look outside of the district. In 2009, I was offered a job as a dean of students at a middle school in Harlem. What made this job different was that the school was a charter school. I was not familiar with charter schools, although they had begun to flourish around the time I was searching for a new opportunity. Because I look at each job as an opportunity to serve students that I had not previously served, I accepted the challenge to learn about the low-income urban charter school experience.

In 2014, after working in that low-income urban charter school organization in many leadership roles, it became evident that no matter what leadership role I was in, I spent the majority of my day coaching novice teachers on how to manage negative behavior, supplement emotional deficits, and fill academic voids. It was with that realization that I decided it was time to do something more formal to help the struggling low-income urban charter school teachers. There had been a great deal of attention paid to the plight of the traditional public school low-income urban teacher; however, there was minimal formal research conducted for the low-income urban charter school teacher.
I made a return to traditional public schools by accepting a vice principal role in Paterson, New Jersey. Transitioning out of the low-income urban charter school has allowed me to develop a more objective lens as precursor to conducting this research.

The questions that were explored in this study were:

1. How, if at all, did teacher preservice training prepare students to teach in a low-income charter school in New Jersey?

2. How, if at all, did administrators support new teachers in a low-income charter school and help them acclimate into their respective school culture and climate?

3. Based on experience, what suggestions would teachers have for other teachers coming into the profession to teach in low-income urban charter schools in New Jersey?

**Design**

This was a qualitative study that aimed to investigate and comprehend the perception that charter school teachers in New Jersey have of their preparation to teach in low-income urban schools. This study was exploratory due to the unpredictable nature of the methodology. Using the qualitative method to collect data allowed for gaining deeper understanding as to how teachers measure their own preparation. The one unit of analysis was low-income urban charter school teachers in the natural habitat of their respective schools. To identify the sample of 18 teachers, I used the New Jersey District Factor Group (DFG) rating. Urban school districts with the lowest rating of an A or B, signifying the lowest state socioeconomic factor, were used in this study. For the purposes of this study the term *low-income urban district* was used to define schools where more than 40% of the student population is given free or reduced lunch.
All three charter schools in this study were located within the DFG A or B that helps to define districts in New Jersey as low-income urban areas, and the likelihood of the participants being new to the profession is higher because low-income urban charter schools tend to hire less experienced teachers (Chizhik 2003; Lankford, H., Loeb, S., & Wyckoff, J., 2002). I selected schools that had a majority minority population based on the DFG. The inclusion criterion for participation in this study was that the teachers had been teaching in their respective schools for 6 years or less. Because the goal of this study was to gain more insight as to why newer teachers either stay or leave low-income urban charter schools, the teachers had less experience in their current school, so as not to affect the retention portion of the study. Additionally, the teachers took the traditional route or alternate teaching route. Nonprofit teacher recruitment organizations were excluded.

Table 1

*Participating Districts*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low-Income Urban District</th>
<th>District Factor Group</th>
<th>Charter School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Large District North Jersey</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>School #1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District in Central Jersey</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>School #2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid Size District in North Jersey</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>School #3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This study interviewed 18 low-income urban charter school teachers in New Jersey. The schools chosen for the study were based on a convenience sample derived from cohort and professor recommendations. Convenience sampling in qualitative
research relies on gathering data from participants who are readily able to participate in the study. This data collection method can be based on a number of factors including location, time, and the availability of the participants. The questions (see Table 3) that were of the teachers delved further into their own personal preparation experiences.

Principals and CEOs were contacted in writing to obtain written permission to conduct the study. Next, the principals identified teachers who met the criteria for the study. A letter of solicitation was developed to highlight the purpose of the study. The instrument and invitation letter were sent, via email, to the charter school principals for approval. Once approved, the instrument and invitation letter were sent to the charter school teacher via email. After the participants self-selected to participate in the study, they were sorted by school and then selected to participate based on years in the field, years at their school, as well as a mix of genders and cultures. A request for demographic data was included in the invitation letter and was used upon data collection. Teachers who volunteered but were not selected were notified via email.

The interview protocol was semistructured with a minimum of 8 interview questions. The questions were reviewed by a jury of experts who are charter school teachers not being interviewed to ensure the efficacy of the questions. I recorded the responses to the questions using a voice recorder. Interview participants were required to sign a waiver indicating that their participation in the study was voluntary and that permission was granted to have me record their responses. Participants were given new names and codes to protect their identity and keep their responses anonymous. Schools were also given new names and codes to protect their identity. Selected participants
received a letter informing them that they were chosen, and a request to schedule their first interview with me was made.

**Profiles of the Participants and Schools**

The profiles and demographic information for each school are below (see Table 2):

   School #1 was located in the northern half of New Jersey. The school services students in grades K–8. The student population of over 800 students is predominately Hispanic and African American with a very small percentage of White and Asian students. There is a 13 to 1 student to teacher ratio. One hundred percent of the students are economically disadvantaged, 11% of the student population are students with disabilities, and 1% are English Language Learners (USDOE, 2013).

   School #2 was located in central New Jersey. The school services about 400 students in grades K–8. The student population make-up is largely African American with about another 10% of other minority students. There is a 12 to 1 student to teacher ratio. Over 80% of its students are considered economically disadvantaged, 8% of the student population are students with disabilities, and there are no English Language Learners in the school (USDOE, 2013).

   School #3 was located in a large urban city, also in northern New Jersey. The school services students in grades K–8. The student population of about 400 is predominately African American with less than 7% of other minority students. The ratio of students to staff is 13 to 1. Forty percent of its students are considered economically disadvantaged, 4% of the student population are students with disabilities, and there are no English Language Learners in the school (USDOE, 2013).
Table 2

**Biographies of Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher #</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Degree Received</th>
<th>Cert</th>
<th>Currently Teaching</th>
<th>Years at School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>BS Psychology</td>
<td>P-3</td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>BS Athletic Training</td>
<td>K-12</td>
<td>5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>BA Education</td>
<td>K-5</td>
<td>Math/Science</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>BA Education</td>
<td>P-3</td>
<td>Math/Science</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>BA Math</td>
<td>SPED</td>
<td>6-8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Math</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>BA Art</td>
<td>Science SPED Art</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>BA Film</td>
<td>SPED Art</td>
<td>Art</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>BA Education</td>
<td>K-12 SPED</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>BS Education</td>
<td>P-3 SPED</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>BA Education</td>
<td>ELA 8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; ELA</td>
<td>8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; ELA</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>BA Humanities</td>
<td>K-12 History</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>BS Psychology</td>
<td>K-6 SPED</td>
<td>SPED</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>BS Education</td>
<td>Elem Ed 6-8 Math</td>
<td>5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Math</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>BS Finance</td>
<td>K-6</td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>BS Phys Ed</td>
<td>K-12</td>
<td>5-8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; P.E./Health</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>BA Geography</td>
<td>K-5 History 5-8 Science</td>
<td>K-5 History 5-8 Science</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>Journal/Comm</td>
<td>K-6</td>
<td>K-4 ELA</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>BS Sociology</td>
<td>K-6 SPED</td>
<td>5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; SPED</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Data Collection**

While conducting the interviews, I followed the qualitative exploratory model as defined by Patton (2002). I submitted and discussed the question protocol (see Table 3) and discussed the method with my dissertation advisor to be sure that the qualitative method is administered correctly. Interviews occurred at the participant’s place of employment or via phone unless otherwise requested by the participant. Table 3 contains the interview questions as outlined by Herzberg’s theory of motivation.

Table 3

*Interview Questions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Interview Question</th>
<th>Herzberg Factor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How, if at all, did teacher pre-service training prepare teachers to teach in a low income urban charter school in New Jersey?</td>
<td>1. Please describe your preservice preparation for working in low income urban charter schools.</td>
<td>Hygiene Factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How, if at all, did administrators support new teachers in a low income charter school and</td>
<td>2. What was the most significant part of your preparation for working in low income urban charter schools?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Describe the initial mentoring process and subsequent administrative support you received as a</td>
<td>Hygiene Factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Category</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>help them acclimate into their respective school culture and climate?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>help them acclimate into their respective school culture and climate?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teacher and how that contributes to your feelings about your current role?</td>
<td>Hygiene Factors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How does the climate and culture of your school affect the way you perform your professional tasks?</td>
<td>Motivator Factors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Explain what motivates you to be successful in your current role and how you gauge that level of success?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Based on experience, what suggestions would teachers have for other teachers coming into the profession to teach in low income urban charter schools in New Jersey?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. What are your plans for the future with regard to teaching in low income urban charter schools?</td>
<td>Motivator Factors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. What knowledge might teachers considering working in a low income urban charter school in New Jersey need prior to doing so?</td>
<td>Motivator Factors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. What might a teacher considering working in a low income urban charter school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
in New Jersey do to contribute to their own success in the classroom?

Data Analysis

Upon completion of the interviews, the text and recordings were blended for each participant to be sure the entirety of the interview was represented. Category construction (Patton, 2002) was employed by forming the data into themes and patterns and analyzing content. After converging the data, themes and patterns began to emerge. The subjects of the interviews, also known as participants, were coded as S1–S18, themes were coded as T1–T100, and patterns were coded as P1–P100 and higher as needed. Once coding was done, there were both single and cross-case comparisons, which helped draw conclusions about overlapping themes and patterns. The data were then collected for the purpose of making inferences and explaining them. When the inferences were established, I started developing theoretical models to elaborate further on the research question.

Following the interview data transcription of the teacher interviews, I reviewed the narrative responses to ensure accuracy in recording. The transcription was sent to each participant as a means of verifying their responses. The transcription was reviewed once more to list topics that have emerged from the codes. Boyatzis (1998) hybrid model of coding was used, as it is researched based as being useful with formulating conclusions based on coding. A coding chart was used to highlight the codes that emerged from participant responses.
Two types of case analysis were used to assess the interviews. First, single case analysis, as developed by Miles and Huberman (1994), was used to evaluate each interview on its own. Without interference from the other interviews, it ensured that themes were not missed or confused with those from other interviews. The interviews were then analyzed using a cross-case analysis. In this version of analysis, themes that reoccurred amongst the interviewees and schools emerged and I cited them. Themes that were seemingly unrelated were also be analyzed in relation to their relevance in the study.

**Researcher Bias**

My bias was monitored by both the dissertation advisor of this study and approval of the questions being used. The advisor reviewed all data as transcribed by me to identify any and all pertinent bias. In the event that the advisor identified issues with the interview, it was nullified, and a new subject was identified.

**Reliability and Validity**

To ensure reliability and validity, a jury of experts consisting of charter school teachers reviewed the questions for validity prior to conducting the interviews. The veteran teachers were asked to give feedback on the formation and clarity of each question. Once the questions were evaluated, I refined the questions as indicated. I conducted two sample interviews to see what types of answers the questions elicited and if those would be useful for data analysis. Follow-up interviews were conducted as needed to create more robust and comprehensive analysis.
Summary

This chapter outlined the methodological requirements of this dissertation. The background, design, data sampling method, and data collection have all been detailed in an effort to create credibility in conducting this research. Additionally, the goal was to ensure a level of consistency on the topic of teacher perception to teach in low-income urban charter schools. The participants in this study offered a much-needed contribution to the research field on this topic. Chapter 4 will detail the findings of the interviews that were conducted.
Chapter 4

Study Findings

Introduction

As stated in the methodology chapter, this was a qualitative study that included interviews of 18 teachers on their perceptions on their preparedness to teach in low-income urban charter schools. The themes and patterns that emerged from the coding of the interview answers will be detailed per research question. The interview consisted of eight questions aimed at addressing the following three research questions:

1. How, if at all, did teacher preservice training prepare teachers to teach in a low-income charter school in New Jersey?

2. How, if at all, did administrators support new teachers in a low-income urban charter school and help them acclimate into their respective school culture and climate?

3. Based on experience, what suggestions would teachers have for other teachers coming into the profession to teach in low-income urban charter schools in New Jersey?

Research Question 1

*How, if at all, did teacher preservice training prepare teachers to teach in a low-income urban charter school in New Jersey?*

The interview questions that addressed this research question were:

1. Please describe your preservice preparation for working in low-income urban charter schools.
2. What was the most significant part of your preparation for working in low-income urban charter schools?

Findings: The majority of teachers interviewed did not have any college training to prepare them to teach in an urban school. One had extensive training in her preservice program, while some others felt prepared through direct interactions in an urban setting. Field experience, cultural awareness, immersion in the culture, and professional development contributed to teachers’ preparation to teach in an urban charter school.

**College preparation.** Differences emerged from participant responses about their preservice training. Ten of the 18 teachers had no college courses that specifically prepared teachers for urban charter schools.

S1: “I would say I was maybe 30% prepared. They didn't take into consideration that I will possibly be teaching in a more urban setting.”

S14: “I really didn't receive any. I did not receive any specific training to teach in an urban environment.”

Three of the 18 teachers reported having urban experience at the collegiate level. Two were placed in an urban environment per the school’s student teaching rotation policy, which called for every preservice teacher to complete a rotation in an urban environment.

S5: “Yeah, it did prepare me overall because I had to do student teaching and that was also done in a low-income area... in an urban area.”

S8: ”The experience I had before working there (in an urban charter school) was I actually student taught there, my student teaching was in the fall.”
One teacher attended a school where there was a separate cohort for teachers who wanted to focus on urban education. The interested students had to apply and gain acceptance and, if admitted, become part of an intensive program that aimed to provide a plethora of field experience and subsequent support for those specific students.

S9: Okay, so I went to a university and they had an urban seminar program. I really wish other colleges would do stuff like this because I feel like really prepared for working in an urban setting. All of my training, all of my classes, everything was geared to urban demographics. Everything. I had to take ... All of my course work prepared me then for my fieldwork. The fieldwork was like I never was in a suburb. Also they rewarded us, gave us incentives to complete the work. It was a really nice program. You also got incentives, but like a scholarship it wasn't just given to you if you just walked into the elementary building and said, “I want to take that class.” No, you couldn't. You had to apply for it. It had to be given to you. You had to earn it. Yeah, it was really great. I felt really prepared. I student taught in a bunch of ... My fieldwork was way more than. I felt really prepared just because that's how it was set up. Most student teaching was only that half of a semester, whereas my whole last year of college was yes classes too, but I was in the classroom for a really long time. I get to see a lot ... I felt really prepared.

**Alternative preparation.** Alternative types of preparation were significant to teachers. Five of 18 teachers reported not having any specific training for urban charter schools at the collegiate level, but they had preservice preparation in alternate capacities
that varied. Teachers discussed their experience in an urban environment or with a student that ultimately led the teacher to teach in an urban environment.

S10: Prior to me becoming involved with teaching, I had a couple relatives that were actually employed with a school district and I would always go and visit them on various different days of the school year and see what the environment would be like and see if that was something that would interest me. Based off my interactions there and observations that I had in the classroom with the kids, I learned that that was something that really did interest me, so I proceeded to try to move forward with trying to find my own route and become a teacher myself. Teachers who grew up in low-income urban environments wanted to give back and work in a similar environment.

S2: The biggest preparation I had was just from my experience as a student in an urban area in New Jersey, where I got to... I was raised with educators. I was open to educators. Just putting some of their experiences to work, at one time my mother ran a school on a high school level. Getting to meet them and see them in classrooms and meeting some of the younger teachers that she worked with and how they handled the students, the things that they were not so much instructing, but more of the lessons that they were teaching. They became great educators, but more so they were marvelous mentors.

Observation of students or direct work experience in an alternate urban school prior to working in their respective charter schools influenced decisions to continue work in a charter school.
S4: I started out as a teacher's assistant in a charter school and from then probably spent 3 months as a TA so I gained the experience inside the school as far as working amongst the children academically. That and then going to the teacher's college to pursue teaching gave me the opportunity and prepare me to teach in the urban district simply because that was my focus as far as making sure that I teach amongst the students that I know would benefit more from my experience.

**Field experience.** Seven of 18 teachers gained their most significant preparation from field experience in either a low-income urban charter school or traditional public school.

S17: “My first school was a regular public school and being in that school helped me learn how to deal with families, which gave me a lot of preparation.”

S2: My fieldwork was done at the same time as my alternate route teaching. It was a trial by fire. That was awe inspiring because a lot of the stuff that I do now comes from the experience that I've had. These are the things that you don't see in a classroom, you don't read in a book, you don't hear about. I knew a gentleman who was an administrator, a superintendent. He used to get these books from his superintendents' organization. He used to say, “‘Here, read some of this.’”

Participants who had some type of preparation felt more prepared to teach in the low-income urban charter school. The experience gave them insight as to what they may encounter in their own classrooms.
**Cultural awareness and immersion.** During the interviews, 6 of 18 teachers cited cultural awareness or immersion in the culture as the most significant part of their preparation to work in an urban charter school.

S17: “I have experience going to those types of school, so I know what to expect. My teachers didn’t give up on me, so I won’t give up on these kids.”

S5: “What helped me the most was I grew up in an urban area, so it's not so strange to me on what to expect. I knew it was the same thing relative to the environment where I grew up.”

S8: “I would say just really understanding the kids and their home life, and how that definitely interferes with their work when they come to school. Understanding their background and what they have going on outside of coming to school.”

Teachers who had exposure to the school culture or immersed in it, felt prepared to teach in a low-income urban charter school. Their personal experiences with the low-income urban environment made them more culturally aware.

**Professional development preparation.** One participant of the 18 indicated that the most significant preparation for teaching in a low-income urban charter school came from professional development at the physical school location before the start of the school year.

S18: When I took the job with my school now, they offer a professional development course for new employees that begins mid-August. They go through a bunch of different courses where they talk about how they want the classroom set up. We talk about how to do classroom management. Throughout the
professional development, they did talk about how our students do come from low-income families, and so trying to open up our minds to sometimes how they come into school. They might have had a bad night. I remember one of the examples was that if a student comes in and they're not performing well, try not to automatically think the child just doesn't feel like learning. Sometimes these kids come from homes where they don't eat a good meal at night or they don't eat a good meal in the morning. Sometimes they're sleeping in the living room because they don't have their own bedroom. There are different variations to their living environments outside of their home life.

From four participants, another theme involved interactions with experienced professionals in the field.

S4:” That would be working with professors who have had experience working in charter schools before they decide to become professors and they gave their feedback and insights of the expectations from the students and also from me. So, it was very helpful to have people who were experienced in that area.”

Learning from experienced professionals in the field of education helped participants to prepare for the low-income urban charter school. Professional development also helped them to continue to grow as professionals.

Research Question 2

How, if at all, did administrators support new teachers in a low-income urban charter school and help them acclimate into their respective school culture and climate?

The interview questions that addressed this research question were:
3. Describe the initial mentoring process and subsequent administrative support you received, as a teacher, and how that contributes to your feelings about your current role.

4. How does the climate and culture of your school effect the way you perform your professional tasks?

5. Explain what motivates you to be successful in your current role and how you gauge that level of success.

Findings: For the second research question, teachers again spoke of mixed experiences. Some did not have effective relationships with their mentors, others had successful relationships with their mentors, and a third group had an absentee mentor. Despite differences in mentoring experiences, most teachers spoke of positive experiences with their administrators. Five of 18 participants had negative experiences with the administration and did not feel supported. The overall impact of a positive relationship with a mentor and a supportive relationship with administration combined, or the presence of one or the other, made for a positive teaching experience for most. For the second interview question, teachers reported that regardless of the climate and culture of the school, they were resilient and determined to give students a quality educational experience. For the third interview question, almost all teachers stated that the students were their motivation to be successful and watching them grow academically and socially was their biggest motivation to be successful as educators.

**Mentoring experience.** Eight of the 18 interviewees had positive relationships with their mentors.
S8: My mentorship I had a first grade teacher be my mentor. She really was very supportive, her classroom is across the hall from mine, so very frequently she would pop in since we do have aides in our classroom. She was able to leave and she would give me feedback. We would meet every Friday after school and talk about the week, then she would give me advice on anything that I needed. She has always been very supportive.

S13: So the initial mentoring was great. I had someone that I have been in constant contact with from my interviews to even up 'til today, and even though I'm in another building now. The mentoring was amazing. I was given constant support in anything, not even just the math, but in everything.

S2: Again, you got to have it. You got to have the mentor. All the paperwork is wonderful and supportive and it helps you to keep track of what you do and how you do and when you're supposed to do. These meetings are intelligent, not just so much for someone else saying, “‘Yeah, you're having this association, you're having this relationship with a teacher, or a master teacher,’” but more so just you getting points of view and you getting knowledge about education.

There were 5 of 18 teachers who reported a negative experience with their mentor.

S15: “I was mentored by the other PE teacher. We learned from each other more than anything. I wanted someone to come to for advice. This doesn’t feel authentic.”

S11: “My mentor was assigned formally, but there was no real relationship. He did drive by observations and would give me mediocre feedback. I wanted to
have more time to observe him and watch him implement the strategies that he so readily suggested that I use.”

The remaining three teachers’ spoke of an absentee mentor, which left them figuring out things for themselves.

S16: In my first year, they actually did give me a mentor. There’s another science teacher who was hired at the same time as me, but has had over a decade of experience at another school. However, she was not very good at what she did. In the entire school year, she only observed me once. And she also quit in March. So I did receive no services from her, and they recognized that was a bad thing. In my second year, however, they were supposed to remedy this and give me a new mentor. They have not, and I have ... And I'm not ... I guess it's partly my fault, 'cause I'm not too ... I'm not too urgent with it. I will remind them maybe every month or so, that they need to get a new mentor, and they say, “‘Yes, we'll get you a mentor, it's a huge priority for us.’” And then I never hear anything.

S14: There really wasn't much mentoring going on unfortunately, because ... I guess the school was going through a transition at the time where there were new officers and things. So it was basically, yes I needed to have a mentor because at the time I did not have my certificate from the state of New Jersey.... my mentor was supposed to help me get my certificate. What happened was I really wasn't getting mentored. What happened was 4 months into my school year I wound up changing positions. My position at the time was a Title I teacher, so like a basic skills teacher. There was a high turnover, and I wanted to be in the
classroom rather than a basic skills teacher. So I took this first-grade position. So my mentoring really didn't happen once I took the next position.

Having a positive relationship with their mentor allowed for participants to learn and foster collegial partnerships. Negative mentor experiences made teachers feel less supported and sometimes unguided.

**Administrative support.** Fifteen of the 18 teachers interviewed felt supported by their administrators.

S10: Well I could say currently at the school I'm currently employed at, I have received a lot of administrative support. They are helpful with numerous resources when I need them. It shows me how to support whatever they need to learn in order to advance to the next grade. So I have received a lot of positive administrative support.

S12: “The administrative team is very supportive. We have weekly meetings about behavioral issues and how to counteract them. That also helps me learn how to work with families better.”

S8: Administration, we have a really, really good administration at our school. Since I had my interview with the principal, she's been so supportive. Honestly, I can't say anything bad about administration; they're just always there for anything. The doors are always open; any questions I have, I always feel comfortable going in there and asking. With observations, they really are there to help you, because I was nervous in the beginning for the observation part. When I got the feedback, they really just want to help you and see you grow to your full potential. All
together it really makes a good work environment. I love going to work every day, and it's because of them for sure.

S3: I guess the feedback that you get; it'll help you along the way. I know when I first started here I didn't have, I wasn't differentiating as much, or working in such small groups with my kids. The feedback from mentoring and administration, like the re-valuation, they will always push for that. I think that, that's important, like, how I feel you should focus on small group instruction and really giving your kids the attention they need. Like I said, with the different learners that you have in your room, just help them out and help your students succeed as much as possible.

The remaining three of 18 teachers did not feel supported by administration. The lack of support has affected other aspects of their teaching such as difficulty with behavior management and lack of specific academic guidance.

S13: The administrative support, I would say wasn't so much there. I think the administrative support would kind of ... it really wasn't there that much, to be honest. It kind of made you feel a little helpless, where, kind of left us to figure most things out on your own. Even questioning it, it was a brand new school, you don't know the daily routine yet, using questions, or just trying to contact different administrators was very difficult. So that kind of brought a little bit, put everything a little bit down.

S5: Well, in the urban area, I didn't really get a lot of administrative support. What I will say in the fact it helped me to understand that it's very important that I deal with myself as a professional teacher and knowing that ... Let me put it this
way, because I didn't really get much administrative support, in the urban area, that helped me to understand ... to be able to work without really making that administrative support the reason why I teach, to focus on the students more than anything.

The participants who had administrative support felt successful and were able to maintain open communication with their school leaders. Participants who did not feel supported by administration operated independently due to the lack of support. This did not necessarily affect their success in the classroom.

**Overall feelings about teaching.** Every teacher reported that they felt positively about their current teaching role.

S17: “It’s not easy transitioning from a non-teaching job into a teaching job. The experiences that I’ve had with the administration confirm for me that I’m in the right place.”

S10: “It makes me feel as though I’m part of a well-knit community, a well-knit team.”

S3:” I feel pretty good about my role as a teacher, because I know I have the support from colleagues and administration. It gives you a more positive outlook.”

S2: I want to go in there and do my job. Now, for some people, it's not a job. For some people it's a calling and all these things are what we do as instructors and as educators. If you're not in it for that, then you're in it for the wrong reasons. We don't make a lot of money. We don't get accolades. We're not the ones going
in the lead stories in the newspapers, but we are the ones that create the world as it will become.

Participants felt positive about their current teaching roles because of support they received either from their mentor or administrator or both. When each teacher felt supported, it made for a positive teaching experience.

In discussing climate and culture with the participants, three issues emerged: parental involvement, classroom management, and collegial support. Teachers felt those issues dictated the climate and culture of their school thus influencing how they were able to perform their professional tasks. Eight of the 18 participants stated that the level of parental involvement impacted how they felt about the climate and culture of their school either positively or negatively. One of the 18 teachers reported the following positive experience with parental impact:

S3: Well, I think with the climate and culture of this school, we have a lot of activities and then parent involvement is important. I have a pretty good rapport with my parents. We also have, even, an app at my school, so, parents can see how many points you give a student each day, it's more positive, and you can also report if they're not following directions throughout the day. They can also see that and I usually post their work. Anything that I might need from them, they're usually very supportive, so I think; it aligns with the parent involvement.

S12: Through my role I have learned how important the support of parents is. I learned to build relationships with my parents and now I have the support. I see it here a lot…the parent relationship and how it’s good with other teachers… Administration works with us on that.
Conversely other participants reported little parental involvement and support and the negative impact that it has had on the culture and climate of their school.

S8: I would say the parent support; sometimes the parent support isn't always there. The parents are either not involved in the child's life or they're working three or four jobs. With test scores and things like that, even though I only teach kindergarten, but I do think if parents were able to be more involved, then it would be higher test scores, especially with the higher grades, too. If what we taught in school was reinforced at home, I think that the kids would be a lot higher than where they are. Unfortunately, for some it's just the parents aren't involved in their lives, but then for others it's that their older brother or sisters are home with them, helping raise them. That was definitely something big that I learned from student teaching, it's one of those things where it took me to step back to really understand the home life.

S14: I have to hunt down parents to talk to me about their children's work, because they don't want to be bothered sometimes. It's like you need to be persistent almost to the point where you're annoying. But you know what; you're doing it for the benefit of the child.

Parental involvement influences how a teacher views the climate and culture of the school in either a positive or negative way. The more parental involvement that teachers experience, the more positively they felt about the school’s climate and culture. While all participants did not mention it explicitly, almost half felt parental involvement did influence the overall climate and culture of the school.
Five of 18 teachers reported that the climate and culture of the school was heavily dictated by the behavior of the students. Participants stated that classroom management, or the lack thereof, dictated a large portion of their low-income urban charter school experience.

S4: Well I guess since I'm new to this particular school, I've had some ... A big challenge with behavior. So although, you know, my last school I had classroom management down pat, at this particular school I've gotten at least 80% of my classroom management, but behavior is one of the biggest issues that you will come across in a charter school and so ... I mean, yeah. There are times when I would tell myself, "Okay. Do I really need to be here?" I'm like, "'Yeah. I don't need these children to run me out of here," because there are days that I feel like that although I've been teaching over 10 years.

S15: “Safety is number 1. If students aren’t listening, then I can’t perform my duties. There are a lot of classrooms that are not safe. Mine is definitely not perfect.”

S16: It affects me in a multitude of ways both positive and negative. On a positive side, I have become a much more stern teacher. Before getting this job, during my student teaching I let certain things go that most teachers wouldn't. I've been very relaxed. Now I have learned to have the “teacher look,” you know what I mean? In a negative way, it's almost too stern. I have become very, very intolerant of certain things that most kids do. I've become a lot less patient. It's also affecting my personal life in many ways. People have noticed that since I've
taken this job, I have become much more stressed and much more rigorous in my personality.

The amount of effective classroom management influenced how 5 of the 18 teachers felt about the school climate and culture.

Five of the 18 teachers interviewed reported that the level of collegial support had an influence on the culture and climate of their respective schools. Some participants required more collegial interaction, while others required less. Whether the participants required more or less interaction, their outlook on the school was affected.

S1: That's a good question. Honestly, I think that, again, from last year to this school year there's a big positive change in the climate. As teachers, we do communicate more with each other. If I'm having a bad day, I can talk to someone about it. I can talk to my co-teacher about it, I can talk to a first grade teacher about it, I can talk to a fourth grade teacher and they're able to say, "Okay, well this is what I did in that situation." Sometimes it does help me. Going back into the classroom, like, "Okay, well I'm not the only going through this." I can get back to what I'm doing. If that doesn't work, I must say that my performance level will probably drop if I'm not able to handle it at that moment. There's definitely a difference if I'm just not able to handle the situation at that time.

S11: Everyone is close and gets along. Everyone has each other's back. I have heard horror stories from teachers at other schools, but we don't have that here. Everyone is open to critique because they have the common goal in mind of helping the kids. It's easy to get up every morning and come to work.
S13: I think for myself, I'm able to perform my professional tasks only because I'm the type of person that doesn't really let the climate and culture affect my job too much. But it just gets to the point where if the climate in the building is kind of, you know, on a downward spiral at some point it does, it just gets to be difficult ... I think for the most part, morale, this year, the climate and culture seems pretty good. The attitude in the building is a little bit better and I think it will get easier.

The participants that reported a preference for keeping to themselves used the time to maintain their own positivity. Isolating themselves from the negative aspects of the school culture is what helped them perform their professional tasks better.

S12: You have to be unique to not let climate and culture affect your professional tasks. I am unique. You have to be able to separate yourself from the drama. I have a ““bubble in my classroom”” mentality, but it’s too easy to get sucked into the negativity.

S9: I mean I think the climate and the culture of our school affects ... I mean I just want to ... I go to work every day to do what I want, what I know the kids need. Then there are people at work who just make it really a negative place. You kind of have to shut them out. You have to learn to keep pushing because you want it for the kids, not really about yourself. That's where it goes back to in college, there were teachers who were dropping like flies throughout urban seminar because they didn't have it in for the kids, and they had it in for themselves. That's where the difference is, I think. You realize shut your door,
shut your lights off, be by yourself while you're working, then do what you need to do when the kids are there.

Participants who were a part of a support system had a positive outlook on school climate and culture. Other participants received their positive outlooks from seeking solace and caring for themselves.

**Motivation to be successful.** Overall, the teachers interviewed are motivated to be successful. Seventeen of the 18 teachers interviewed stated that watching their students grow and learn academically is the reason they are driven to meet with success in their current teaching roles. They also stated that watching that growth is how they measure their success.

S4: My motivation is every day I wake up, I know that when I get to work, I'm going to at least change one student's perception about their life and why they're in school and I look forward to going to make sure that I have a positive impact on them because even though I said that behavior is an issue, that can be turned around with just making sure that they know that you understand what they're going through. It's one of those things where they want you to know that not only are they there for you to teach them, but there to nurture them. Again, your role as a teacher is not necessarily just to teach them as a teacher, but you also become their parents and they don't understand that when you tell them that, but I look forward to going there because I know at the end of the day, I can look back at my day and say, "Wow. So-and-so actually got it. Great." When I'm teaching a lesson and they're getting it, I literally get goose pimples because I feel like, “Yes.” You know? So it's a challenge, but you can overcome those challenges.
S1: Actually, just to see the growth in my students, that is my biggest motivation right there. From how they come in in September, they still want to run around, they're not used to the hundred percent structured classroom. Just to see the change from September even to December before Christmas break, that's what motivates me to push them even further. I just think that because of maybe the environmental effects that they're probably going through after school, it's just more rewarding for me to be the role model for them, to show them, “Look, we can still have fun but in a structured way.” I'm just more motivated just to see the change in the students, the growth in the students. If I'm teaching something that's not even just based off their character, but I'm teaching something that they've been struggling with, and after the second week if they still don't get it, I evaluate myself. What am I doing wrong? I'll change my strategies, I'll change the whole setup and lesson just to go back and reteach it. If they're not successful, I don't feel successful. Pretty hard on myself with that.

S10: What motives me to be successful is simply seeing children succeed. One thing I can say honestly is that nothing makes me feel greater than actually knowing that what I'm teaching a child in the classroom is actually something that they're learning and is actually something that they enjoy learning. I always want the child to feel as though they're comfortable when they come to school.

S2: I'm a fifth generation educator. With that I get teary eyed and my nose is starting to run. I'm very proud of who I am and what I am. I love the fact that I can get a captive audience. I love the fact that I can have an exchange of ideas and get these young minds to see the possibilities of what could be and what they
might be and to be what they want to be. My level of success is being driven by my desires to be able to have every last one of my students go forth. I'll never know what my level of success is until the business of education tells me that you have handled the business of education as far as the school system is concerned. Their level of success comes from my father's memorial service where people stood in front of my father, or in front of my family, and said how wonderful he was and instrumental he was in their lives, not so much in the classroom, but in who they are now. My success will not necessarily come from a grade. My success may not come for another 10, 15, 20 years. I'm going to do everything I can to make them brilliant, but I'm doing more so that I can to make them great citizens.

One of the 18 teachers stated that motivation to be successful was driven by the possible career opportunities that the school had to offer.

S13: I think what motivates me to be successful is probably seeing the different positions and different advances that could possibly happen. I know that in some of my other jobs that I've had there really wasn't room to grow and it was pretty obvious. So, almost like you're working a position and you know that there really isn't too much, anywhere you could go from there. I think in the position that I'm in now, I think there's a lot of different responsibilities that I could eventually take on. And I think that is what motivates me because I know that I'm not just stuck in this one position and this one job. It's been many different ways that I can kind of advance.
Participants had positive feelings about teaching because of their motivation to help their students be successful. They equated their success or failure to that of student performance. They were determined to help their students achieve their highest levels and worked to reinvent themselves to accomplish that goal.

**Research Question 3**

*Based on experience, what suggestions would teachers have for other teachers coming into the profession to teach in low-income urban charter schools in New Jersey? The interview questions that addressed this research question were:*

1. What are your plans for the future with regard to teaching in low-income urban charter schools?
2. What knowledge might teachers considering working in a low-income urban charter school in New Jersey need prior to doing so?
3. What might a teacher considering working in a low-income urban charter school in New Jersey need to do to contribute to their own success in the classroom?

**Findings:** All participants spoke of immediate plans to remain in their low-income urban charter school. Some hoped to eventually move to another school, and a few aspired to move into an administrative role. Teachers advised anyone considering working in a low-income urban charter school to arm themselves with experience by spending time in the low-income urban classroom, be culturally sensitive and open minded, and develop an overall understanding of working in a low-income urban charter school. Furthermore, teachers stated that in order for a teacher who is considering working in a low-income environment to contribute to their own success, they needed to seek professional
development opportunities, make sure they were the right fit for the school, and to self-reflect and take care of oneself.

**Plans for the future.** Twelve of the 18 teachers spoke of plans to remain in their specific low-income urban charter school.

S5: Well, I intend to teach there for a long time from now because I feel they need more help ... the schools in an urban area, they need more help than the other schools. There are issues and behavioral challenges. However, there is a great need to move those kids from one point to another academically and behaviorally. So I intend to stay.

S10: My plans for the future would be to continue doing what I'm doing. I believe consistency is key as well, but if it's not broken, don't fix it. I feel as though if I'm working with the children, and the way I'm teaching them is progressive, then I feel as though that's something I want to stick with.

S2: Wow, that's funny. I was on a trip this weekend, and I saw the best man from my wedding who's an administrator. He asked me would I be interested in a fifth grade position next year back to where I just came from. I told him that I'm not interested in just picking up and going again. I also told him that I would be remiss in just doing a one-year sting and hitting the road again. I've always wanted to be someplace to do a job well enough where someone would look at me and say, “I'll see you in August.” My plans for teaching again in this sort of setting is to do everything I can to maintain this position and to do what I came to do, which is to educate.
Two of 18 teachers wanted to remain in the urban environment; however, they wanted to move to another school.

S14: “I do like the urban environment. I would like to continue being in the urban environment. Not just this school.”

S16: I'd love to continue teaching in low-income areas. I'm not too ... Honestly, after being in a charter school, for 2 years, I see their value, and I see why people like them. I don't know if I would personally continue working here, simply because of the lack of stability.

Four of the 18 teachers aspired to move into another role either in their respective schools or outside of it.

S1:” I would like to have a supervisor role in the school. Outside of that, I was thinking of opening my own preschool center. I'm just in between, but I'm not ready to leave the classroom yet to become a director.”

S11: “My long-term goal is to be a history professor. I want to work in an urban environment helping aspiring history teachers as well.”

Regardless of their ultimate goal, participants wanted to remain in their school. They felt comfortable enough to either stay in their current role or seek an alternate position. They also wanted to remain in the low-income urban environment.

**Necessary knowledge.** Exactly half of the teachers, 9 of the 18, would advise the teachers considering working in a low-income urban charter school in New Jersey to get experience prior to doing so. Since participants felt it was important for candidates to know their audience, they thought the experience they gained would be the catalyst for that to occur.
S8: Definitely I would say the experience from college in a classroom that is low-income. I think that would definitely be beneficial. Definitely with me coming from going into suburban schools, it's totally different. They're two totally different experiences. I think colleges being able to have those students visit maybe a school where the kids are wealthy, but then a school where it's a low-income school. I think that's important.

S17: Experience should be required. They should be aware of the stress teachers may face because they can be worn out due to the lack of experience. Experience will allow for them to have more insight into the importance of good behavior management, and it will give them a willingness to understand the student and remain positive.

S10: The knowledge that they might have to have, they need to have some teaching experience or some observation before jumping into deciding to be a teacher because it's not something that you can wake up and say, “Hey I want to be a teacher!”, but you haven't been on the other side of the “fence,” you've only been a student your whole life, but you haven't seen it from the side of a teacher, nor have you observed it, so you have to make sure that you have a thorough observation of what you want to get yourself into when it comes to being an educator.

S4: Well I would say just be familiar with the area that you will be teaching in and just to have an understanding of you will encounter children who will come in with, unfortunately, baggage that you don't expect them to have and what's going on in society today because although I'm 47, I know some stuff out there and I
teach third grade and the things that they know, I'm still trying to learn. So they have a different language. My thing would be just be familiar with the area that you want to teach in, you know, and their culture because, as you know, most of the children in urban school districts are probably 95% African American and Hispanic, so you just have to be able to communicate with them on how they learn.

**Sociocultural awareness.** Six of the 18 teachers interviewed stated that teachers who are considering working in a low-income urban charter school should be sensitive to the culture of the students and therefore keep an open mind.

S11: They need to know the reality of what they face without judging the kids. They can’t have a “I’m going to save all these kids” mentality. They must remember that they are students who just want to learn. This includes being open minded and willing to understand their cultures.

S15: They must relate to the kids. They can do that by knowing where they come from. They have to be prepared for some frustration if they are not from that culture, too. It is a good challenge though, and if they stick with it and believe in the kids then they will learn.

S13: I think the biggest thing is to be flexible and to have an open mind because the life that you may have had growing up is not necessarily how these children are brought up. And I learned pretty quickly that what’s normal to me is completely foreign to them. And I think it took a little while to get used to it, whereas at first it was more of like a shock factor of, not realizing the low-income areas and how they're brought up. I think it's more of just being open, being
flexible, and knowing not the background of the kids, but knowing that certain things are sensitive.

The participants advised those seeking to teach in a low-income urban charter school in New Jersey to get experience teaching in a low-income urban charter school. No matter how the interested person obtained the experience, the participants felt that the experience was needed to help them do their jobs effectively. Experience would also allow for the interested person to become more culturally sensitive.

**The charter school difference.** Three of the 18 teachers stated that teachers who are considering working in a low-income urban charter school need to be aware of the reality of what that means.

S14: I think it's you're going to be busy, you're going to work hard. You're going to meet children, families, that maybe you're not accustomed to dealing with, or just the way they speak to you. If you're not accustomed to that, if that's not your daily lifestyle and you come from a place that's more affluent and you're going into an urban area, you may not feel comfortable, like that. I think it's you just need to be familiar with your surroundings. Be giving and willing to go the extra mile. Again you're not going into this for the money. If you want to go into an urban district, you really want to teach. It's not just; oh I like the teaching schedule. Our schedule is definitely not the norm.

S17: I think that being fully aware of the demands that a charter school requires. I do feel like it is good for teachers. It's not a bad place to work. It's actually a really good place to work because they do expect a lot from their teachers, which is good because that also means that they expect their teachers to really teach the
students. Their main focus is for the kids to excel and do better. I do appreciate that part of the charter school and that's why I understand why they have the extended school year and the extended school days. They are trying to do gear it more towards better education for the students as well as helping out the families that need the extra child care because some parents need the before and after care. They can't really afford day care or baby sitters. The charter schools are wonderful in that aspect where they offer these programs to the parents. It really helps them out financially. They do Saturday programs; they do after school tutoring programs, so they're very education driven. S1: They need to know that charter schools are also public schools, but they receive a lot less funding than the public schools. Going into charter schools, I just thought, “Okay, we need these supplies, okay, we can order it. We need this. Oh, we want to go on this trip, we can just go and do it.” In a charter school, it's totally different. Because it's less funding, the teachers do come out of pocket more and cannot expect to be reimbursed. I think it's important for them to know that the budgeting is a lot different from the public schools. Definitely, and that the state comes in to visit charter schools more so than public schools. I feel charter schools have to be on a higher level, per se, than the public schools just because of that. You get more state visits so the expectations are higher than a public school.

Participants thought it was important for people interested in teaching in low-income urban environments to know the difference between the traditional public school
and charter schools. In preparation for their success, they need to know how charter schools are different than traditional public schools.

**Self-Success.** Eleven participants felt that prior to making a decision about teaching in a low-income urban charter school, the interested people must know if they are the right fit for the school and environment. This forethought will benefit the all stakeholders, most of all the students.

S11: “Visit as many low-income urban charter schools that you can before you commit to one. The more exposure you have the better it will be for you to make an honest decision. It may be the hardest thing you’ve ever done in your life.”

S9: I guess really make sure, and research, and really get to know the community that they're choosing to work in. Really make sure that that's the right fit for them, because if they're not able to understand where the kids are coming from and make that relationship with the children, I don't foresee them to be an effective teacher. I mean there's this, for example, we just had this woman hired at our school, and she's already just, “These kids. These kids.” I'm like, “What do you mean? You haven't even gotten to know them.” Do you realize what's going on when they go home? Do you know that there's a gang right there? Do you know that they probably didn't have lunch or breakfast or dinner?... And she just stares at me. You need to make sure that you are a right fit for that community and you know the demographics of that community and ... You should know about your school. How many kids have special needs? You really need to do your research and make sure you're ready to contribute to make their lives better.
**Professional development opportunities.** The pursuit of professional development opportunities, both self-driven and provided by the school, was how 4 of 18 participants felt teachers considering working in a low-income urban charter school could best contribute to their own success.

S7: Keep on learning, keep on searching, keep on finding a way to make sure that it's effective, what you do. I think we have to be proactive, learning from the situation like I said, keep our minds open and allowing more learning in. I think also like learning more curriculum will help, yeah.

S4: Okay. Well I always would say, aside from the professional development that the school will give you, you need to be able to get your own outside professional development because it's not always that the things you know you need, your school might not offer as a group, but there are ways that you can do individual learning and you can bring that back to the school. That's one of the biggest things with the urban school district; they want you more professionally developed than you think. I mean, like myself, I would say, “Listen. I’ve been doing this for over 10 years. How much professional development do you want me to have?” But doing PD on your own is an excellent thing because then that shows that you're taking initiative. You don't wait for them to say, “Well, okay. You need professional development in this.”

S12: Reaching out and finding resources will never get old. There will always be resources. Go out and find what is there that can help you. Things will always change and be new, but if you seek PD and go to it you will receive the support you need to be successful in your own right.
All participants felt that interested teachers can be successful in their own right by developing and enhancing their craft via any professional development. Professional learning would present the candidates as being proactive in the eyes of the school administration.

Three of the 18 teachers interviewed stated that taking care of oneself was the best way a teacher considering working in a low-income charter school in New Jersey could contribute to their own success.

S15: “Take time for yourself. Leave work at work. I get frustrated sometimes and start to think about the students constantly. I stop myself and exercise. The physical activity helps me to de-stress.”

S1: I guess, me, I'm always asking myself what could I have done better? Could I have applied myself more? Should I have made that decision? I reflect every day about my day. If it wasn't a good day, why wasn't it? Why didn't it work? What can I do to turn this around? Positive. It's like keeping a diary of yourself, where you have come from Point A to Point B. I'm constantly reflecting on myself. It's kind of like self-evaluating, too.

S16: Don't take on more than you can handle. Always assess the situation and only take on new things if what you're already doing is too easy, because the last thing you want to do, especially as a brand new teacher in an urban environment whether it's a charter school or a public or private school, is to put yourself in a position where you're carrying too many tasks at once, 'cause you will burn out too quickly.
Participants stated that above all else, a person interested in working in a low-income urban charter school must find a way to take care of themselves. Taking care of oneself would be the best way to be proactively successful.

**Summary**

This chapter outlined the findings of the research conducted for this dissertation. It is also important to note that the responses given produced patterns that were relevant. One such pattern was the overall lack of preservice preparation specific to low-income urban charter schools. Few participants spoke of being required to gain formal collegiate experience in low-income urban charter schools prior to working in their current schools. The types of experiences they had taken on various forms; however, still proved influential in their daily work interactions. Despite the level of preparation, a participant received, they had overall positive work experiences and planned to continue working in low-income urban charter schools. The participants felt successful and had an innate motivation to see their students succeed regardless of how they came to work in their current role. The data that were collected for this study reveal several additional implications that will be discussed in the next chapter.
Chapter 5

Discussion, Implications, and Summary

Introduction

This was a qualitative study that included the interviews of 18 teachers on their perceptions on their preparedness to teach in low-income urban charter schools. The research questions explored in this study were:

1. How, if at all, did teacher preservice training prepare teachers to teach in a low-income charter school in New Jersey?
2. How, if at all, did administrators support new teachers in a low-income urban charter school and help them acclimate into their respective school culture and climate?
3. Based on experience, what suggestions would teachers have for other teachers coming into the profession to teach in low-income urban charter schools in New Jersey?

In this chapter, the findings of the data collection will be summarized and correlated to the research questions for this study. Additionally, there will be discussion about the theoretical model that was proposed for this study within the context of the existing literature on the topic in question. Finally, implications for further research and policy on this topic will also be reviewed.

Discussion

The interviews of the 18 participants and the assessment of the data determined that most teachers working in low-income urban charter schools overall did not initially feel prepared to do so. The participants did, however, report that through various support
methods, they felt successful enough to either continue in their current role at their current school or to seek work within the low-income urban environment. Preservice teacher programs, student success outcomes as they relate to the support teachers receive from administrators, and self-efficacy with cultural awareness were themes that emerged from this study and were also cited in the literature.

The first research question sought to examine how, if at all, did preservice training prepare teachers to work in a low-income urban charter school. The data showed that the teachers who did receive preservice training, which was specific to low-income urban charter schools, felt prepared to work in them. The teachers who did not have any preservice training did not feel as prepared. Research has shown that in order for teachers to feel prepared to work in low-income urban schools, prior to doing so, they should have specific training in low-income urban areas. Some practices may work in higher socioeconomic areas; however, they cannot be generalized as effective teacher practice in all socioeconomic areas (Monk, 2015).

Data showed that participants who had preservice preparation to work in low-income urban charter schools had either specific course work or field experience/observation in the low-income urban environment. Participants had those experiences both formally with their respective colleges or informally. Either way, having those experiences was the most significant part of their preparation. In alignment with the research, Milner (2008) states that both preservice teacher courses and experiences are crucial to the growth of knowledge, conceptual understanding, and practical understanding of classrooms in low-income urban schools.
The second research question examined what role administrative support played in helping teachers acclimate to the culture and climate in their respective charter schools. Data showed that participants who had a positive rapport and experience with their mentors felt more comfortable and confident in their teaching roles. The existing literature states that novice teachers need experienced mentors to improve. They need a professional who can model and provide feedback consistently (Bancroft, 2008). Participants who did not have a strong relationship with their mentors were still able to be successful. However, teachers did not feel as supported and had to acclimate to their respective schools independently. A positive mentoring relationship or the absence of an effective mentorship experience can affect a teacher’s perceptions on his or her ability to be successful for both themselves and their students (Bullough, 2005).

Administrators played a crucial role in helping participants acclimate to their schools. The teachers who felt supported by administration were able to excel in their roles. Research indicates that significant relationships with school administrators have been found to be a necessary resource for new teachers in general (Huisman et al., 2010). Data showed that participants felt particularly successful when they were offered professional development opportunities from their respective administrators. Research states that principals can directly influence a teacher’s experience by focusing on working conditions. This specifically means offering more support and professional growth (Iasevoli, 2016). The participants who did not receive administrative support in any capacity reported a negative beginning to their teaching experience.

The climate and culture of the low-income urban charter school did influence how a participant was able to perform professional tasks. Data showed that many participants
reported behavior management to be a problem in their schools. This negatively contributed to the climate and culture because teachers were not prepared to address negative classroom behavior. Researchers agree that preservice teachers base their self-efficacy on their field experiences, which often take place in classrooms that are not reflective of the low-income urban school (Ross, 1998). Teachers felt that they were not always equipped to address the issues that they faced with students because they had not had prior exposure. Research shows that teachers who are not prepared with cultural awareness are increasingly not as successful in low-income urban schools (Gay, 2002; Villegas, 2008). Most preservice teachers do not have personal or educational experiences with low-income urban schools or their students (Jacobs, 2015); therefore, the concept of teaching in a low-income urban school is often conceptualized in a negative way by inexperienced teachers (Jacobs, 2015).

Regardless of the challenges participants faced, data showed that they were motivated most by watching and helping their students grow and succeed. Research shows that the most successful teachers have the belief that all students can succeed; they immersed themselves in their classroom community and truly believed in learning in a reciprocal capacity between students and teachers (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Teachers reported difficulty navigating advancing student achievement with learning deficits and behavioral issues. These factors did not stop them from being motivated to be successful. Researchers believe proper preparation of teachers who work in low-income urban schools starts with changing their multicultural outlooks, increasing their cultural knowledge, and giving them the tools they need to teach successfully (Gay, 2002; Milner, 2009). Teachers reported receiving support from each other as one way of helping to
reinvigorate their motivation. Verbal persuasion is when novice teachers receive positive verbal reinforcement from colleagues and administrators alike on a regular basis. This helps those teachers to develop a robust belief in their own abilities to accomplish the most difficult tasks (Bandura, 1997).

The third research question examined the suggestions current teachers would have for those considering working in a low-income urban charter school in New Jersey. Participants reported that they wanted to continue their work in low-income urban charter schools. The work of Darling-Hammond states that the preparation of teachers in general is said to have a direct link to the success of a teacher in the profession and the length that a teacher may remain in the profession (Darling-Hammond, 2005). The data showed that whether teachers were prepared or not to teach in a low-income urban environment, their immediate intentions were to stay and work toward more success with their students. Some teachers reported that they ultimately had plans beyond the classroom, but they did not correlate to the amount of preservice preparation they had.

Participants recommended that anyone considering working in a low-income urban charter school have some prior experience in that environment prior to doing so. The person should be culturally aware and be open to the students and their environments. Sociocultural awareness is defined as the identification, acceptance, and affirmation of one’s own and other people’s cultural identity (Gay, 1995; Sachs, 2004). Cultural awareness is very important in the success of teachers in low-income urban schools (Sachs, 2004). Participants stated that a person who is aware of who students are will be most successful with behavior and ultimately student achievement. If a teacher is
invested in this awareness, it presents itself as respect for and belief in all students (Haberman, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Zeichner, 1996).

Participants felt it was important for prospective teachers to be aware of the differences between public and charter schools. Charter schools were established in 1992 in an attempt to bring back autonomy and ownership in the districts, schools, and classrooms of the United States (Renzulli et al., 2010). The goal was to provide a less structured and bureaucratic experience than the traditional public school. According to participants, low-income urban charter schools can be more structured, which ironically was not the intent when charter schools were originally conceptualized. More is expected of charter school teachers than those in traditional public schools. According to the research, those expectations led to high turnover with novice teachers in some low-income urban charter schools. Regardless of the initial intent of the charter school design, there is sometimes high turnover amongst the newer staff (Bancroft, 2008). The data did not show that high turnover of teaching staff was as significant as prior research had shown.

In order for teachers to contribute to their own success as low-income urban charter school teachers, participants felt it most important that prospective teachers be the right fit for the school and the job. This is in direct connection with self-efficacy and how it affects one’s ability to perform the tasks at hand. When teachers own the responsibility, and believe in their ability to increase student-learning outcomes, they are more successful in the low-income urban classroom (Goddard et al., 2004). In alignment with the research, a prospective teacher should be self aware enough to know if they can be successful in a low-income urban charter school classroom.
Along with self-awareness, participants stated that professional development is crucial to meeting with self-success. More specifically, self-motivated professional development is what participants believe can help perspective teachers drive their own success. The findings are consistent with research stating that teachers who pursue their own professional development opportunities foster the resiliency needed to continually work toward success (Huisman et al., 2010).

Herzberg’s theory of motivation was the conceptual framework that crafted this study. Theory states that hygiene factors refer to an employee’s environment, and dissatisfaction occurs only if these elements are absent or not handled correctly. Hygiene factors include, but are not limited to, company policies, supervision, salary, interpersonal relations, and working conditions. Motivators, conversely, create satisfaction by fulfilling individuals' needs for meaning and personal growth. Achievement, recognition, the work, responsibility, and advancement are all examples. Once the hygiene areas are addressed the motivators will promote job satisfaction and encourage production (Herzberg et al., 1959).

The research results uncovered that the hygiene factors correlate directly to the motivators. If the environmental needs of the participants were met, the more rapidly they felt motivated to succeed. Contrarily, if a participant was lacking or missing elements of their hygiene factors, he or she was less motivated.

**Recommendations for Policy**

All colleges and universities in the state of New Jersey should implement an urban seminar program for preservice teachers. This program should have an intensive component for those who wish to work in low-income urban schools in New Jersey.
Preservice programs should include charter schools in student field experience. For the preservice teachers who do not have a specific interest in the low-income urban school, they would take a more traditional route; however, they should still be required to do field experience in a low-income urban public and charter school for a shorter period of time. It would also beneficial to add a pipeline from the universities directly to the charter schools. These measures would better prepare preservice teachers for what they will face in low-income urban schools. Charter school legislation needs to be examined further to be sure that teachers are certified appropriately to meet the needs of the students. This certification should ensure that pre-service teachers have had preservice training in low-income urban charter schools prior to working in them.

While the state of New Jersey does require that each novice teacher have a state-appointed mentor, that program is not always effective. To begin, there must be a more selective process for choosing the state mentor to ensure a rich and relevant mentoring experience. The policy recommendation is to have the mentor and school administration work in combination with the novice teacher more formally. Evidence of work such as preplanned check-in meetings, specific growth plans, and professional development trainings should be submitted to the state as evidence of the work with novice teachers. Novice teachers are required to pay for the mentor service; however, some are not getting the full support that they need to be successful as low-income urban charter school teachers. While the data in this study did was not consistent with high turnover rates, the research shows that high turnover continues to be a problem in low-income urban charter schools (Bancroft, 2008). Implementing a more formal checks-and-balances system
between the administrative staff and mentor helps to reduce high turnover rates in the field.

Policy recommendations for attracting high-quality candidates should begin with the state test that is required for preservice candidates to begin work in schools. This test, currently known as the PRAXIS, should have some questions that are specific to low-income urban charter schools. The test should measure what we value; in this case it is the proper education of low-income urban students. If preservice teachers receive required field experience in low-income urban charter schools, then they should be able to answer the questions effectively. The general pool of candidates should be equipped with the knowledge needed to be successful in any type of school. Currently the Professional Improvement Plan is required by the state; however, the guidelines for submission are not specific to low-income urban charter schools. The state should require that Professional Improvement Plans for low-income urban charter schools have at least one goal that is specific to that type of school. This would allow for teachers to focus specifically on their environment and pathway to success.

**Recommendations for Practice**

The purpose of this study was to explore preservice teachers’ perceptions on their preparedness to teach in low-income urban charter schools. As a result of this study, there are three recommendations for practice that should be noted for educators and researchers. First, all novice teachers entering the low-income urban classroom should not only have a state mentor, but they should have a “buddy” or person whom they can connect with to help them navigate their role. The buddy should be someone less formal, but supportive, so there is more than one person that a novice teacher can go to for
assistance. This allows for the creation of a collaborative environment. One of the issues that participants reported was that their mentor or administrator was short on time. This would help to counteract the lack of time issue and offer an additional layer of support for the novice teacher.

The second recommendation for practice is to implement a Positive Behavior Support and Intervention System (PBSIS) in low-income urban charter schools in New Jersey. As mentioned, these schools have financial difficulties, so the implementation of a program like this could be costly. Keeping that in mind, it is examining the budget and drawing a cost analysis on a PBSIS program versus the impact a school’s negative climate and culture has on its staff and students. When the staff feels supported and they have options in classroom management and addressing students’ behavior, it contributes to a more positive climate and culture in the school (Warren, J. S., Bohanon-Edmondson, H. M., Turnbull, A. P., Sailor, W., Wickham, D., Griggs, P., Beech, S. E., 2006). Implementing PBSIS could be a part of a charter school’s efforts to professionally develop its staff, especially new teachers. Participants reported how beneficial school-specific professional development can be.

The final recommendation for practice would be to create a program that allows prospective teachers to gain insight into what a low-income urban charter school looks like prior to officially accepting a position. This program would require candidates to spend time in the specific low-income urban charter school to which they are applying to work. This would be a field observation in between completing a preservice program or applying for alternate route certification and actually accepting a position. Participants mentioned that it is very important for those considering working in a low-income urban
charter school in New Jersey to make sure the school is “the right fit.” One way of gaining insight and a realistic perspective is to spend time in the actual specific school environment. This practice could be mutually beneficial, and school administration will see how the candidate interacts with the school climate and culture prior to making a hiring decision.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

One implication for research based on this study should be an intense analysis of preservice teacher programs in colleges and universities as well as alternate route preparation and classes. Preservice preparation programs have not traditionally geared coursework and field experiences toward the urban charter school teaching candidate. While some collegiate programs offer student teaching or a field experience in a low-income urban environment, these have not proven to be enough to prepare teachers. More data should to be gathered on what preservice programs are offering and what needs to be offered to fill in the existing gap. Alternate route programs should be examined as well, specifically focusing on transitioning adults from other careers to the low-income urban charter school environment and how best to prepare those candidates for the challenges they may face.

Another implication for further research is how the relationship between the state mentor and administration can be strengthened to create optimal support for the low-income urban charter school teacher. The data in this study showed that most participants had the support of a mentor and administrative staff. This support was vital to the retention of these staff members who largely decided to stay at their current schools in their current roles. Further research into what specifically about the support
the teachers in this study are receiving that makes them want to remain in their roles should be done. This could hopefully begin to counteract the retention issues that some other low-income urban charter schools are facing.

The final implication for this study is that more research needs to be conducted specifically on the low-income urban charter school. There is a large body of research that has been conducted on the traditional low-income urban public school. However, this research does not necessarily apply the low-income urban charter schools. As noted in the data for this study, participants noted that it was imperative for teachers considering working in a low-income urban charter school to have field experience in the environment prior to doing so. While charter schools are technically considered public schools, they are simply not the same. In order for a teacher to feel prepared to teach in low-income urban charter schools, research must clearly outline what these schools look like and indicate how they differ from traditional public schools.

Summary

This study was designed to gain perceptions of participants on their preparedness to work in low-income urban charter schools in New Jersey. The data analysis of this study supports that in order for preservice teachers to feel prepared they need to have better preparation programs, administrative and mentor support, and self-efficacy with cultural awareness. Through the interviews that were conducted for this study, the data also show some concerns with school climate and culture, specifically the lack of classroom management. A prospective candidate needs proper exposure to this environment prior to accepting a position in a low-income urban charter school. It is also
crucial to a teacher’s success to seek professional development both on her or his own and by actively participating in the sessions that are provided by the administration.

As mentioned, this study was specific to low-income urban charter schools in New Jersey. While there was some variety in the findings overall, all three of the charter schools involved had teachers who were passionate and committed to their students’ success, both behaviorally and academically. While this was evident in their responses about their motivation to be successful, this sentiment was echoed throughout other points in the interviews. The teachers’ motivation is what seemed to encourage them to offer their students a quality education regardless of environmental circumstances. This passion and resilience is what is needed to help students and staff meet with successful outcomes.

Through conducting these interviews with the participants, I have learned that resiliency exists when there is a genuine passion associated with the work that one does. The teachers were driven, passionate, focused, flexible, and reflective. Their positive energy has enhanced my faith in the ability of the human being to adapt to what they are faced with. Furthermore, the scholarly portion of this study has enhanced my knowledge base. This study is what will always hold me accountable for reacting to what I see and working to make deficits in low-income urban charter schools better.
References


prescriptions. Greenwood Press, Inc., 88 Post Road West, Box 5007, Westport, CT 06881.


Appendix A

Permission to Conduct Research
LETTER OF SOLICITATION

Dear Educator:

As a doctoral student at Seton Hall University in the College of Education under the supervision of Dr. Barbara Strobert, your school is invited to participate in a research project entitled: Perceptions of teachers on their preparedness to teach students in low income urban charter schools in New Jersey.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the perceptions of teachers on their experiences with regard to their preparation for teaching in low income urban charter schools. The study seeks to interview 6 teachers in your school who have 3 or less years of teaching experience.

There are no identified risks from participating in this research. The interviews are anonymous. The interviews will take place approximately one month after approval from the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board (IRB). In total the interviews will last no longer than 45 minutes.

A questionnaire has been designed with 8 primary questions to gain perceptions of teachers on their readiness for their teaching position.

Please note, your participation is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

No identifying data will be recorded, so that no one will ever be able to link the responses to you or your school. The participants name, present employment school or position, years teaching at your district will not be disclosed.

To maintain confidentiality, all recordings and notes will be stored electronically on a USB memory key and stored in a locked, secure drawer in my home and all responses will be kept confidential.

Further information regarding the research can be obtained from the principal researcher, Kimberly S Wright (201) 357-4862 or my faculty advisor Barbara V. Strobert, Ed.D., barbara.strobert@shu.edu, (973) 275-2324.

Permission: Your signature and return of this form (via email) indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you are willing to allow your district to participate, and that the researcher can contact your administration with more information.

Signature: ___________________________ Date: _______________________

Preferred Contact Information: __________________________________________

Thank you for your consideration,

Kimberly S Wright
Appendix B

Informed Consent Letter
INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

Researcher Affiliation: Kimberly S Wright is a doctoral student enrolled in Seton Hall University’s Department of Educational Leadership, Management and Policy.

Purpose of Study: The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the perceptions of charter school teachers regarding their feelings about their preparedness to teach in low income urban schools. This study will explore whether and in what ways the preparation for teaching in low income urban Charter schools was sufficient or was not sufficient with regard to a teacher’s feelings on their level of success and longevity in the field. The focus of the participants of this study is low income urban charter school teachers’ because the majority of prior research was done in the traditional public school settings. With rapid the expansion of charter schools occurring in low income urban areas, it is necessary to expand empirical research on teacher preparation.

Duration: An in person or telephonically interview for approximately 45 minutes.

Procedures: If you decide to participate, we would schedule the one interview at a mutually agreed upon location or over the telephone. Kimberly S Wright would like your permission to audiotape the interview; however, you can decline this request at any time. If you choose not to audiotape our discussion, detailed notes on your responses to the questions will be taken.

Instruments: A questionnaire has been designed with 8 primary questions to gain teachers perceptions of their experiences with regard to their preparation for teaching in low income urban charter schools. Below are sample questions that will be used in the study:

1. Please describe your preservice preparation for working in low income urban charter schools.
2. Explain what motivates you to be successful in your current role and how you gauge that level of success.
3. What knowledge might teachers considering working in a low income urban charter school in New Jersey need prior to doing so?
Voluntary Nature: Your participation is voluntary and can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Anonymity: No identifying data will be recorded, so that no one will ever be able to link the responses to you. Your name, present employment school or position, years teaching at your school will not be disclosed.

Confidentiality: To ensure confidentiality each responder will be provided a code (numbers 1 thru 16) in place of their identifying information. Additionally, your district and school will not be identified.

Records All responses will be kept confidential. Recordings and notes will be stored electronically on a USB memory key and stored in a locked, secure drawer in Kimberly S Wright’s home.

Risk: There is no anticipated risk by participating in this study.

Compensation & Benefits: No compensation will be provided and Kimberly S Wright cannot guarantee that you personally will receive any benefits from this research. However, your responses may assist various vested entities such as, colleges and universities or school administration find additional ways to assist teachers working low income urban charter schools.

If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact:

Researcher:
Kimberly S Wright
Seton Hall University
400 South Orange Avenue
Jubilee Hall Room 422
South Orange, NJ 07079
Home (201) 357-4862

Advisor:
Dr. Barbara Strobert
Seton Hall University
400 South Orange Avenue
Jubilee Hall Room 408
South Orange, NJ 07079
(973) 275-2324

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, please contact the IRB (IRB@shu.edu). You will be offered a copy of this form to keep.
Your signature indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you willingly agree to participate and be audio recorded, that you may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty, that you will receive a copy of this form, and that you are not waiving any legal claims.

Signature: _____________________________ Date: _____________________________

-OR-

Your signature indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you willingly agree to participate and NOT be audio recorded. By not being audio recorded, you are allowing the researcher to take detailed notes during the interview. Your signature also indicates that you are aware that you may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty, that you will receive a copy of this form, and that you are not waiving any legal claims.

Signature: _____________________________ Date: _____________________________
Appendix C

IRB Permission Letter
February 6, 2017

Dear Ms. Wright,

The Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board has reviewed the information you have submitted addressing the concerns for your proposal entitled “Perceptions of Teachers on Their Preparedness to Teach students in Low Income Urban Charter Schools in New Jersey”. Your research protocol is hereby approved as revised through expedited review. The IRB reserves the right to recall the proposal at any time for full review.

Enclosed for your records are the signed Request for Approval form and the stamped original Consent Form. Make copies only of this stamped form.

The Institutional Review Board approval of your research is valid for a one-year period from the date of this letter. During this time, any changes to the research protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to their implementation.

According to federal regulations, continuing review of already approved research is mandated to take place at least 12 months after this initial approval. You will receive communication from the IRB Office for this several months before the anniversary date of your initial approval.

Thank you for your cooperation.

*In harmony with federal regulations, none of the investigators or research staff involved in the study took part in the final decision.*

Sincerely,

Mary J. Ryzicka, Ph.D.
Professor
Director, Institutional Review Board

cc: Dr. Barbara Strobert

Office of Institutional Review Board
Presidents Hall • 400 South Orange Avenue • South Orange, New Jersey 07079 • Tel: 973.313.6314 • Fax: 973.275.2361 • www.shu.edu

A HOME FOR THE MIND, THE HEART AND THE SPIRIT
REQUEST FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH, DEMONSTRATION OR RELATED ACTIVITIES INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

All material must be typed.

PROJECT TITLE: PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHERS ON THEIR PREPAREDNESS TO TEACH STUDENTS IN LOW INCOME URBAN CHARTER SCHOOLS IN NEW JERSEY

CERTIFICATION STATEMENT:

In making this application, I (we) certify that I (we) have read and understand the University's policies and procedures governing research, development, and related activities involving human subjects. I (we) shall comply with the letter and spirit of those policies. I (we) further acknowledge my (our) obligation to (1) obtain written approval of significant deviations from the originally-approved protocol BEFORE making those deviations, and (2) report immediately all adverse effects of the study on the subjects to the Director of the Institutional Review Board, Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ 07079.

Kimberly S. Wright 10/26/16
RESEARCHER(S) kimberly.s.wright DATE

**Please print or type out names of all researchers below signature. Use separate sheet of paper, if necessary.**

My signature indicates that I have reviewed the attached materials of my student advisee and consider them to meet IRB standards.

Barbara ~ [signature] 11/2/16
RESEARCHER'S FACULTY ADVISOR [for student researchers only] DATE

**Please print or type out name below signature**

The request for approval submitted by the above researcher(s) was considered by the IRB for Research Involving Human Subjects Research at the [ ] 2017 meeting.

The application was approved __ not approved ___ by the Committee. Special conditions were ___ were not ___ set by the IRB. (Any special conditions are described on the reverse side.)

Mary J. Puziale, Ph.D. 2/6/17
DIRECTOR,
SETON HALL UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL

Seton Hall University
3/2005