

## ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: FRAMING NOVICE TEACHER  
PERSISTENCE: A COLLECTIVE CASE  
STUDY OF EARLY-CAREER AFRICAN-  
AMERICAN TEACHERS IN URBAN  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Efforts to recruit high-quality minority teachers have proven successful over the past two decades, particularly for low-income, high-minority, and urban schools. Unfortunately, increases in minority teacher hiring have been undermined by the high turnover rates of minority teachers and novice teachers -- e.g. teachers who have less than five years of professional teaching experience. Teachers who embody both of these characteristics, novice minority teachers, are doubly disadvantaged because they experience higher turnover rates than their colleagues. As a result, low-income, high-minority, and urban schools continue to struggle to maintain teacher staffing levels for the student populations with the greatest need for quality and consistency.

The purpose of the study was to explore why novice African-American teachers choose to remain in the profession after their first three years of teaching in urban school settings. Through the lens of social cognitive career theory (Lent,

Brown & Hackett, 1994, 2000, 2002), the study explored novice African-American teachers' personal characteristics and background experiences which framed their pursuit of a teaching career, identified the contextual challenges and supports which had the greatest impact on their teaching self-efficacy and outcome expectations, and examined how these teachers mitigated apparent and perceived challenges to career persistence.

A qualitative collective case study design (Stake, 2005; 2006) was used to gain a deeper understanding of how novice African-American teachers' personal characteristics, background experiences, and contextual factors proximal to teaching shaped their career self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and persistence in urban schools. This study adds the novice African-American teacher voice to existing research on novice urban teacher retention and provide a better understanding of their unique needs. The findings of this study can be used to develop targeted teacher training, recruitment & induction initiatives designed to increase the number of African-American teachers who eventually enter and sustain the urban teaching workforce.

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STUDY OF EARLY-CAREER AFRICAN-AMERICAN TEACHERS IN URBAN  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

by

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Background

The United States is home to over 308 million individuals of various racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. In recent decades, the United States has experienced a significant demographic shift. Up until the 1940 Census, approximately 90% of the population in the United States identified as White or Caucasian. Since then, while the U.S. population has increased by 135 percent, the White population has grown from 116 million in 1940 to 196.8 million in 2010 – a 69-percent increase from 1940. As of the 2010 Census, the White population represented only 72 percent of the total population – a decrease of 19 percent. Meanwhile, minority populations experienced exponential growth over the past 70 years. The Black population tripled from 12.8 million in 1940 to 38.9 million in 2010, representing 12.6 percent of the total population. The Hispanic population increased at a staggering rate during the same time period – from 1.9 million in 1940 to 50.4 million in 2010 – now representing 16 percent of the total population. Given these trends, it is anticipated that the United States will become a “majority-minority nation,” with over 50 percent of the population representing racial and ethnic minority groups, for the first time in 2043. (Gibson & Lennon, 1999; Humes, Jones & Ramirez, 2011; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012)

As the United States has become more racially and ethnically diverse over time, so have its public schools. Over the past twenty-five years, the percentage of Black and Latino students enrolled in U.S. public schools has increased dramatically.

In 1986, approximately 26 percent of the public school population was of Black or Latino descent; as of 2011, Black and Latino students accounted for 39.1 percent of all public school students (Kee, 2012; U.S. Department of Education, 2004). It is predicted that public schools will become increasingly diverse in the years to come, with public schools becoming “majority-minority” as soon as the 2016-2017 school year (Hussar & Bailey, 2013). Despite the increasingly diverse student bodies enrolled in today’s public schools, the teaching pool has not seen a similar demographic shift. While the number of Latino teachers has grown from 2 percent in 1986 to 6 percent in 2011, the number of Black teachers has remained relatively stable – representing 6 percent of the total teaching population in 1986 and 7 percent of the total teaching population in 2011 (Feistritzer, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Although there has been a slight increase in the number of Black and Latino teachers in schools, the teacher pool does not adequately reflect the diversity of the populations they serve. Given the changing demographic of the nation and the public student population, there is heightened interest in the limited representation of Black and Latino teachers in public school classrooms across the country (National Research Council, 2010).

In their review of empirical studies on the importance of Black and Latino teachers in today’s classrooms, Villegas & Irvine (2010) outline three main benefits: diverse teachers can serve as role models for their same-race students (Irvine, 1989); minority teachers can improve the academic outcomes of all students, not just minority students (Dee, 2004; Villegas & Davis, 2008); and recruiting more diverse teachers would decrease the teacher shortage, especially in difficult-to-staff urban

areas (Eubanks & Weaver, 1999; Horng, 2009; Scafidi, Sjoquist & Stinebrickner, 2007). As a Black woman who attended public schools throughout her primary and secondary education, I serve as a testimony to the benefits of having minority educators at various points during my academic journey. I am indebted to the teachers who served as my academic and professional role models, who made sure to encourage and support me along the way. Based on my review of the literature and my personal experiences under the tutelage of minority educators, I believe that it is critical that public school districts seek to recruit and retain minority teachers to serve their ever-diverse student bodies. It is within this frame of reference that I explored the lived experiences of novice minority teachers during the early years of their careers in urban school settings.

### Statement of the Problem

Historically, teaching has been a popular career choice for African-American professionals. Over 40 percent of African-Americans employed in professional fields at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were educators – second only to clergymen (Foster, 1997). As public education became more widespread and the enrollment of African-American students in schools increased, there was a greater demand for Black teachers, particularly in the South where segregated schools were commonplace (Anderson, 1988; Bernard & Mondale, 2001a; O’Brien, 1999). Major differences in the quality of resources for these segregated schools sparked efforts to integrate White and Black schools. The landmark ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 was viewed as a victory, overturning laws which mandated separate schools for

Black and White students. Unfortunately, desegregation had a negative impact on the African-American teaching force. The *Brown* ruling declared that separate education systems for Black and White students were inherently unequal. The inadequacy of resources allocated to Black schools compared to White schools was apparent; however, the ruling implied that the African-American teachers employed in segregated Black schools were not as capable as their White counterparts. Many Black educators lost their jobs due to displacement from positions in predominately White schools or the sudden closure of all-Black schools. As a result, Black teachers flocked from the profession and fewer Black students have aspired to enter the profession since then (Bernard & Mondale, 2001b; Hudson & Holmes, 1994; Milner & Howard 2004; Oakley, Stowell & Logan, 2009; Tillman, 2004). Additional barriers such as poor educational opportunities at the elementary and secondary levels, increased reliance on racially-biased standardized teacher testing, the rigidity of teacher certification requirements, and access to additional career paths have also been cited as reasons for fewer Black teachers in today's schools.

Efforts to recruit high-quality minority teachers have proven successful over the past two decades, particularly for low-income, high-minority, and urban schools. Unfortunately, the increase in minority teacher hiring has been undermined by the high turnover rate of minority teachers (27.8%) compared to their White colleagues (8.3%), with the highest turnover rates still occurring in low-income, high-minority, and urban schools (Ingersoll & May, 2011). Additionally, while the attrition of veteran teachers is on par with the attrition rates of professionals in comparable fields (Harris & Adams, 2007), the attrition rates of novice teachers -- e.g. teachers who

have less than five years of professional teaching experience – are also of particular concern. Prior research suggests that between 40 and 50 percent of teachers leave the profession within their first three to five years of employment (DeAngelis & Presley, 2010; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Kersaint, Lewis, Potter & Meisels, 2007). Factors contributing to novice teacher attrition include school locality (Boyd, Lankford, Loeb & Wyckoff, 2005; Guarino, Santibanez & Daley, 2006; Guin, 2004; Ingersoll, 2001a, 2001b, 2002), student demographics such as race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status (Boyd et al, 2005; Hanushek, Kain & Rivkin, 2004; Loeb, Darling-Hammond & Luczak, 2005; Scafidi, Sjoquist & Stinebrickner, 2007; Scheopner, 2010), dissatisfaction with salary and compensation (Dolton & Klaaw, 1999; Gilpin, 2011; Hughes, 2012; Johnson, Berg & Donaldson, 2005), and the lack of a supportive professional culture (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). The high rates of beginning and minority teacher turnover have direct implications for distributions in teacher quality, student academic outcomes, and school functioning (Guin, 2004; Hanushek, Kain & Rivkin 2004; Ronfield, Loeb & Wyckoff 2013).

### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study was to examine the contextual factors that novice African-American teachers encounter as they navigate their first three years of teaching in urban school settings. Through the lens of social cognitive career theory (SCCT; Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1994, 2000, 2002), I explored novice African-American teachers' personal characteristics and background experiences which frame their pursuit of a teaching career, identified the contextual challenges and supports

which had the greatest impact on their teaching self-efficacy and outcome expectations, and examined how these teachers mitigated apparent and perceived challenges to career persistence. This study adds the novice African-American teacher voice to existing research on teacher retention and provides a better understanding of the unique needs of the novice minority teaching workforce. Through an examination of these teachers' needs and strengths during the first three years of teaching, teacher certification programs, school districts, and school administrators can develop policies and induction initiatives to improve the retention of novice teachers of color.

### *Overview of Conceptual Framework*

This study examined the career persistence of novice African-American urban teachers through the lens of social cognitive career theory (SCCT; Lent et al, 1994, 2000, 2002). In this section, I provide an overview of Bandura's (1986, 1989) social cognitive theory – the theoretical foundation of social cognitive career theory. Next, I introduce Lent et al's (1994, 2000, 2002) extension of social cognitive theory to academic and career decisions. Finally, I demonstrate how social cognitive career theory can be applied to examinations of teaching career choice and persistence.

#### *Social Cognitive Theory*

Social cognitive theory, developed by Bandura (1986, 1989), postulates that human behavior is not influenced by personal attributes or the surrounding environment alone; rather, personal factors, environmental influences, and behaviors interact and influence each other to inform future behaviors and interactions within

the greater society. Personal factors include defining attributes such as race/ethnicity, gender, age, ability, and predispositions based on physical characteristics.

Environmental factors includes physical and social contextual variables such as geographic location, family composition, socioeconomic status, access to opportunity, and sources of human, social, and economic capital. Behaviors, while modeled and replicated based on observations within an environment, also alter the environment through the interaction. Future interactions within an environment – and the greater society – are altered through experience. As a result, people are products and producers of their environment.

The bidirectional influence of personal factors, environmental factors, and overt behaviors – known as *triadic reciprocal determinism* – does not imply that these factors influence equally or simultaneously. Nonetheless, it is the culmination of these factors at any given point in time that informs self-efficacy and outcome expectations. *Self-efficacy* refers to perceptions of one's ability to perform certain tasks or handle certain situations based on prior performance and relevant knowledge bases. *Outcome expectations* represent the predicted outcomes of certain actions or behaviors (Bandura, 1977, 1982). Personal beliefs about one's abilities and the projected outcomes of overt behaviors directly influence key choices in life – including the choice to pursue a given career.

## Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)

Lent et al (1994) extend Bandura's social cognitive theory to the field of career development. Recognizing the influence of self, lived experiences, and the environments in which these experiences occur, social cognitive career theory (SCCT) asserts that self-efficacy and outcome expectations influence academic and career choice processes. Self-efficacy and outcome expectations, based on previous experiences, directly influence career *interests*. Once cultivated, interest in a given career path helps to cultivate *goals* related to reaching their intended career path. Goals can be overarching (e.g.: becoming a doctor, founding a non-profit organization) or intermediary (e.g., graduating from college, forming a board of directors). Goals, in turn, inspire *actions* that will aid individuals in attempting to meet their career goals. *Performance attainments* resulting from goal-inspired actions serve as learning experiences that influence self-efficacy and outcome expectations related to the chosen career path. These performance attainments serve

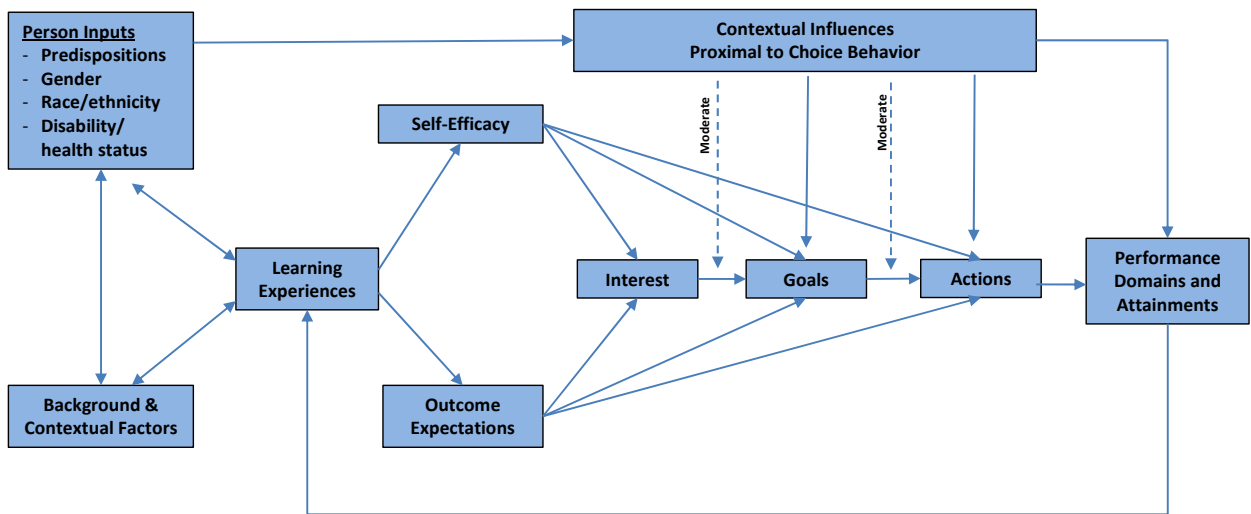


Figure 1. Model of social cognitive career theory, demonstrating the role of person, contextual, and experiential factors in career choice (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1994).



as natural opportunities to reevaluate career choice. Positive performance fosters positive beliefs of self-efficacy and outcome expectations, which may encourage continued interest and intentions to pursue a given career; negative performance produces negative beliefs of self-efficacy and outcome expectations, which may decrease career interest and increase the likelihood of departure from the previously-chosen career path. Based on personal reflection of performance attainments, career interest may be reinforced by positive performance attainment or diminished due to negative performance (Figure 1).

#### *SCCT and Persistence*

SCCT provides an appropriate framework for the analysis of the various factors that influence educators' conscious choice to persist in the field. Self-efficacy and outcome expectations for teachers are greatly influenced by their previous experiences as students and student teachers. Pre-service and in-service teachers often cite the influence of elementary and secondary teachers in their decision to pursue a teaching career, particularly for minority teachers. Research has also shown that novice teachers' choice to remain in the profession during their early teaching careers is informed by their performance in the classroom (Cochran-Smith et al, 2012). The end of the school year is a natural evaluation point, giving novice teachers an opportunity to reflect on their performance, their efficacy during the school year, and alignment between outcome expectations and actual performance. Depending on their perception of their performance, as well as the perceptions of their school administrators, colleagues, students and parents, the novice teacher may

choose either to persist in the profession, migrate to another school environment, or leave the profession altogether.

### Research Questions

My primary research question is as follows: *How do personal, background, and contextual factors influence teaching career persistence for a group of novice African-American teachers in urban school settings?* The following supporting questions guided my inquiry:

- How do the pre-college, pre-service, and in-service experiences of novice African-American teachers influence their teaching career persistence?
- Which personal, background, and contextual factors are most impactful to African-American teachers' choice to persist during their first three years of teaching in urban school settings?
- How do novice African-American teachers mitigate apparent and perceived challenges to career persistence?

A qualitative approach was used to explore the lived experiences of novice African-American teachers in urban school settings. Utilizing data obtained from in-depth interviews and participant-designed photograph collages, I conducted a collective case study (Stake, 2005, 2006) to gain a deeper understanding of how novice African-American teachers' career self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and teaching context influence their persistence in the teaching profession.

### Significance of the Study

Previous studies have highlighted reasons for teacher turnover and attrition – in essence, why teachers fail to remain retained in the profession. Through this study, I examined the “goodness” of novice African-American teachers in urban school settings and how they persisted during the most difficult period of their transition from in-service to pre-service, their first three years in the profession. The concept of “goodness,” as defined by Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis’s (1997), calls for researchers to seek out the successes of respondent experiences instead of the failures (p. 9). It is through this lens that I examined the experiences of novice African-American teachers in an attempt to add their voice to the growing body of literature on urban teacher retention.

## Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

### Persistence as a Career Choice

The literature on teacher career trajectories frame teacher retention, attrition, and mobility as a choice. These choices may be voluntary choices from the point of view of the teacher or involuntary choices premeditated by school-site or district-level influences. The end of the school year serves as a natural reflection point for career choice decisions; however, due to the appearance of apparent or perceived challenges, teachers may feel compelled to reflect on their self-efficacy and outcome expectations at any point during the school year. Novice teachers, most recently removed from the guided teacher preparation process which encourages constant reflection on practice, are doubly challenged by the burden of high professional expectations set by administration, parents, and students, as well as their own self-doubt about their adequacy in a new role in an ever-changing environment.

Teacher mobility archetypes can be generalized into three categories: “stayers,” who are teachers who choose to remain in their current school site for another school year; “movers,” who are teachers who choose to relocate to different schools within their district or different localities to teach; and “leavers,” who are teachers who choose to leave the classroom for other careers in education or careers in other fields. Persistence in teaching, therefore, would include teachers who choose to either remain in teaching roles at their most recent school site or move to a different site to assume a new teaching role. For the purposes of the present study, teachers who leave the classroom to pursue education careers outside of the

classroom -- despite their continued employment in the education sector -- are classified as “leavers” who do not persist in the teaching profession.

### *Novice Teacher Persistence*

Numerous studies on novice teacher persistence have demonstrated the influence of teacher experience and school locality on novice teacher mobility. Overall, novice urban teachers are more likely to move out of their districts than novice non-urban teachers (Guarino et al, 2006; Ingersoll, 2001a; Ingersoll & May, 2011; Johnson et al, 2005). DeAngelis & Presley’s (2011) analysis of urban teacher mobility patterns since the 1970s found that increased movement between schools in urban areas had a larger impact on school site staffing than overall teacher retention, noting the impact of teacher mobility on student outcomes and school culture. In their study of novice teachers who leave their original teaching assignments during the first five years of teaching, Theobald & Michael (2002) postulate that minority teachers are more likely to move to a new teaching environment than White teachers because minority teachers are in higher demand, particularly in urban areas. This presents minority teachers with more potential job opportunities than White teachers.

Clotfelter, Ladd & Vigdor’s (2005) quantitative review of micro-level teacher data across the state of North Carolina, novice teachers were predominantly placed in schools and among classrooms in schools in a way that disadvantages African-American students due to their level of experience, which strongly correlates with teacher effectiveness and student performance. When teacher race is taken into account, novice minority teachers in urban districts are significantly more likely to

move schools or leave the profession than novice White teachers in urban districts and novice minority teachers in non-urban districts.

In a study of the mobility patterns in New York City, Boyd, Lankford, Loeb & Wyckoff (2005) discovered that teacher transfers to new schools and teacher departures from the district were more prevalent for teachers who worked in minority-majority schools. While White and Hispanic teachers were found to be more likely to leave schools that enrolled higher percentages of minority students, little relationship was found between the racial composition of the student body and African-American teacher retention.

Cochran-Smith et al (2012) challenged the simple dichotomy of “stayer” vs. “leaver,” demonstrating that career decisions can be linked to teacher performance as well as the multi-faceted typologies of novice teachers. In their study of novice teachers’ early career decisions, Cochran-Smith et al discovered five typologies of novice teacher career choices related to teacher practice: strong teachers who stayed at their original schools; strong teachers who changed schools; average teachers who changed schools; problematic teachers who chose to change schools; and problematic teachers who left the profession.

In Johnson & Birkeland’s (2003) examination of the impact of school location and school experiences on mobility, five similar typologies also emerged: “settled stayers,” who were comfortable with their current teaching placements; “unsettled stayers,” who were likely to stay in the profession but move to another placement site; “voluntary movers,” who actively sought better teaching environments, “involuntary movers,” whose placements were changed due to poor performance or

staffing needs elsewhere; and “leavers,” who left the profession entirely. After the first year of teaching, 74 percent of teachers chose to stay at their school for a second year, 14 percent moved to a different school for their second year, and 12 percent left the profession. After the third year, 56 percent of the original sample remained at their original school site but more than half of these teachers were not satisfied with their school or their career choice.

### *Influences on Novice Teacher Mobility and Persistence*

Previous research on novice teacher mobility patterns and persistence highlight the multitude of factors that influence novice teachers’ choice to persist in the field. Olsen & Anderson (2007) conducted a grounded theory study of 15 novice urban teachers in Los Angeles to discover what factors compelled teachers to stay or leave a particular school or, more broadly, to stay or leave teaching altogether. Of the 15 teacher studied, six teachers were classified as “stayers” who intended to teach indefinitely, six teachers were classified as “uncertains” who were unsure of their teaching future or intended to leave in the relatively near future, and three teachers were classified as “shiffters” who intended to leave the classroom in the immediate future for other education careers. The results indicated that personal and familial factors played a large part in novice urban teacher retention. Although all 15 participants remained committed to their reasons for entering the profession, 80 percent of the teachers stated that their families disapproved of their decision to enter the profession. Four of the six “stayers” were looking to change sites for familial reasons, such as caring for family or preparing to start a family of their own. Some “leavers” also mentioned the desire to start families and that they did not feel that it

would be difficult to maintain a work-life balance with their current workload. The high demands of urban teachers, as seen during their early teaching experiences, dissuaded them from committing to teaching for the long-term for fear of burnout or loss of effectiveness.

Not all novice teachers who leave the classroom leave the education sector altogether. Quartz et al (2008) conducted a study on teacher mobility into non-teacher roles within the education sector. Tracking the mobility patterns of teachers after completion of a graduate alternative certification program, Quartz et al (2008) found that 60 percent of teachers remained in the classroom, 29 percent remained in education but were no longer teaching in a K-12 setting, and 11 percent left education altogether within their first five years of teaching. Additionally, African-American teachers, younger teachers, and secondary teachers were more likely to leave the classroom for a role change in the education sector. The authors argue that a surge in administrative roles, such as district-level administrators and school-based instructional staff, play a role in teacher departure from the classroom; the teachers that choose to move are not being pushed out of the classroom but are being pulled into more advanced roles. The study did not, however, seek to identify any other factors that contributed to possible changes in career goals, such as the school environment, familial demands, or an original intention to use the teaching experience as a “stepping stone” to more advanced opportunities (Olsen & Anderson, 2007). Although these teachers remain within the education sector, their departure from the classroom still creates teacher vacancies that need to be filled (Theobald & Michael, 2002).



Boyd et al (2005) conducted a quantitative study of the mobility patterns of novice teachers in New York City public schools over an eight-year period, including site transfers and teacher resignations. Analysis of teacher mobility data, teacher characteristics, student characteristics, and working conditions at each school site found that teachers who changed schools or left the profession were most often working in low-performing districts, teaching in majority-minority schools, less qualified per state certification standards, and/or non-New York City natives. Proximity to the school site was also found to be a mitigating factor for mobility decisions, with teachers who lived farther away from their teaching sites more likely to transfer to schools closer to where they lived (Boyd et al, 2005).

Ingersoll & Smith (2004) examined the influence of various types of induction support on first-year teacher mobility. Utilizing data from the first four cycles of the National Center of Education Statistics' Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) and supplemental data from the Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS), the authors examined ten different induction support mechanisms for novice teachers, including mentoring support, tailored professional development, common planning time, collaboration with fellow teachers, professional teaching communities, supportive administrators, reduced teaching time, additional planning time, and additional classroom assistance. Findings suggest that novice teachers who do not receive induction support were 50 percent more likely to transfer schools or leave teaching compared to novice teachers who received at least three types of induction support and 120 percent more likely to transfer or leave than novice teachers who received at least eight induction supports.

Johnson & Birkeland (2003) found that efficacy played an important role in new teachers' decisions to stay at their schools, move to new schools, or leave the profession altogether. Success depended largely on school-site factors -- the role and contributions of the principal and colleagues, teaching assignments and workload, and the availability of curricula and resources. Teachers who left the profession but intended to teach for the long-term felt overwhelmed by the job demands and believed that there was little support from administration, citing "principals who were arbitrary, abusive, or neglectful, and they spoke of disappointment with colleagues who failed to support them as they struggled to teach." (p. 593). For these teachers, pay and prestige were not as important as working in a supportive, rewarding environment.

While an overwhelming majority of studies of novice teacher career patterns focus on "leavers", there are a few standout studies that examine novice teacher career patterns from a persistence perspective. Huisman, Singer & Catapano's (2010) study of 12 New York City teachers with less than two years of full-time teaching experience sought to uncover the factors which led to new teacher resiliency, as opposed to reasons behind novice teacher departure. The teachers were participants in a novice teacher mentoring program, where they were paired with faculty who provided feedback and support during their first two years of teaching. Seven key themes emerged: significant adult relationships, mentoring others, problem-solving, hope, high expectations, sociocultural awareness, and professional development. However, major limitations of the study include the lack of diversity of the subjects (only one teacher in the sample was African-American) and the emergent themes are

reflective of their participation in a mentoring program which is not commonly available to novice teachers nationwide.

In addition to external support, teachers can also look to internal personal motivators and supports to promote positive views of self-efficacy and encouraging outcome expectations. Le Maistre and Paré (2010) suggest that new teachers use a skill called "satisficing" -- finding a sufficient solution to a problem that is satisfying to the teacher to cope with some of the problems they face without the necessary experience to make the most optimal decision:

"Instead of asking the difficult questions -- Is this the best possible solution out of a number of possible solutions, and what is the probability that this solution will maximize the result? -- the satisficer asks, consciously or unconsciously: Is this a solution that will work and can I live with the outcome?" (p. 562)

Satisficing as a means of persistence is a concept worth investigating in novice African-American teachers, given the need to remain positive and focused while under a tremendous amount of stress in a high-stakes work environment.

Quartz (2003) highlights a novice urban teacher who states that she is "too angry to leave," their frustration with the system and desire to improve the education landscape for their students motivating them to stay in the profession. Tamir (2013) cites similar examples where, despite a lack of support from veteran colleagues, teachers felt compelled to stay because they felt they were letting their students down and wanted to make a difference for their students. Although the teacher's racial background is unclear in the study, a social-justice sentiment is often touted as a

reason why African-American teachers persist (Olsen & Anderson, 2007; Tamir, 2013).

Overall, the literature on novice teacher career patterns overwhelmingly focused on teacher attrition (e.g., why teachers leave) as opposed to teacher persistence (e.g., why teachers stay). In addition, studies were mostly quantitative in nature and provided little qualitative context to support massive claims regarding factors related to novice teacher departure. Studies on the career decisions of novice urban teachers focused primarily on the novice White teacher due to an implied sociocultural disconnect between White teachers and student populations with large percentages of minority students. Few studies on the career decisions of novice African-American teachers in urban settings were found; data on the patterns of novice urban African-American teachers were often subsumed in larger studies, not specified as in urban contexts, or too small of a sample to become generalizable to urban African-American teachers as a whole. While a cultural match between teacher and student may prove beneficial for student outcomes, a cultural match does not necessarily guarantee that a teacher of color will have an easier time making the transition from pre-service to in-service. In fact, teachers of color often experience cultural-based “practice shock,” whereby their cultural identification is challenged by students and their parents despite their role as a classroom leader (Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008; Maylor, 2009).

Given the prevalence of personal, background, and contextual factors as explanatory influences on teacher mobility and persistence patterns in the literature, social cognitive career theory (SCCT) is an appropriate framework for examining the

factors that influence African-American teacher persistence in urban settings. As highlighted in Chapter 1, SCCT recognizes the role of personal characteristics, background experiences, and contextual influences on career choice processes.

Figure 2 depicts an adaptation of the SCCT model of career choice to reflect teaching career persistence. In the present model, personal and background characteristics serve as direct influences on teachers' initial motivations to enter the teaching profession and decisions to persist in the field. Teachers previously declared their interest in a teaching career as well as the goal of performing teaching duties for the school year based on their pursuance of a teaching credential, acceptance of initial employment as a teacher, and renewal of commitments to teach for subsequent school years. The teacher's actions, performance of teaching duties, are inherent to the teaching position and expected as part of the teacher's job requirements. Contextual influences proximal to performance of teaching duties -- whether they are inherent to the classroom environment or externally-based -- contribute to teachers' abilities to perform job duties as prescribed. Performance attainments serve as opportunities to reflect on their performance, self-efficacy in their role, and outcome expectations for future performance.

The present study views persistence as a conscious choice that can be made at any point during career pursuit; with respect to teaching careers, the end of the school year is a natural milestone for evaluating career self-efficacy and outcome expectations. The section that follows takes a closer look at the various personal, background, and contextual influences that were examined through this study.

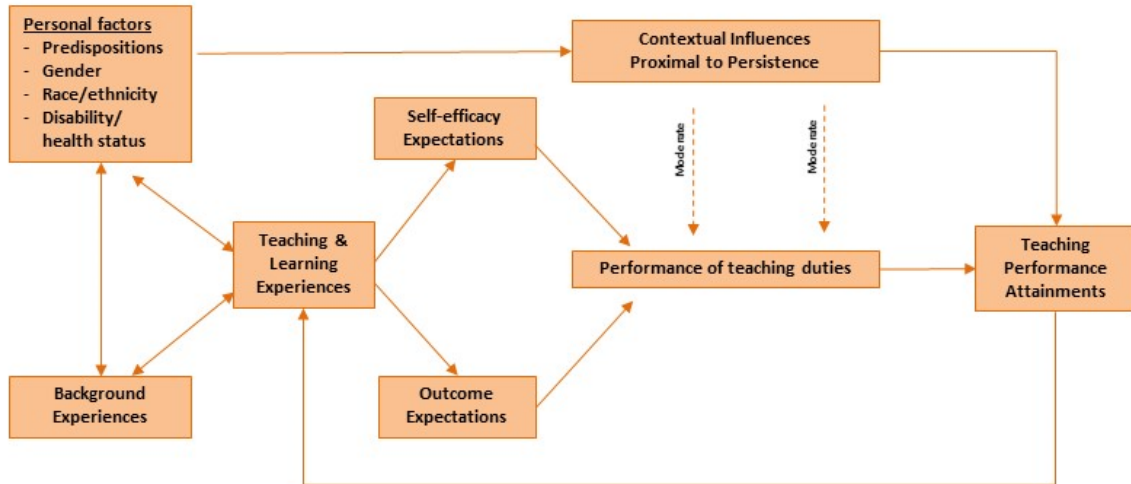


Figure 2. Model of social cognitive career theory and teaching persistence. Adapted from Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1994, 2000, 2002.

### Factors Influencing Novice Teacher Persistence

#### *Personal factors*

College and career decisions – and the factors that influence these decisions – are based on personal characteristics that predate the high school years. The literature cites three primary personal factors that influence career choice: socioeconomic status (Charles, Roscigno & Torres, 2007; Hanson, 1994; Hearn, 1991; Lee, Hill & Hawkins, 2012; Schlee, Mullis & Shriner, 2009; Zhan, 2006); demographic characteristics (An, 2010; Charles et al, 2007; Howard, Carlstrom, Katz, Chew, Ray, Laine & Caulum, 2011; Kao & Tienda, 1998; Solorzano, 1992); and parental and peer expectations & encouragement (Cooper, 2009; Conklin & Dailey, 1981; Cunningham, Corprew & Becker, 2009; Fletcher, 2013; Holland, 2011; Hossler & Stage, 1992; Sandefur, Meier & Campbell, 2006; Sokatch, 2006; Thomas, Alexander & Eckland, 1979). These influences are often compounded for African-American and other underrepresented minority students and, as a result, fewer African-American students attend college compared to their White peers.

### *Socioeconomic Status*

Socioeconomic status (SES) refers to one's ability to access human capital, the collection of tangible and intangible resources that are used to maintain or better one's position in society (Becker, 1962; Bourdieu, 1986; National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2012; Schultz, 2000). Investment in human capital, as Becker (1962) states, is achieved by participating in "activities that influence future real income through the imbedding of resources in people" (p. 9). There are three main forms of human capital: economic, cultural, and social capital. Changes in socioeconomic status can be attributed to personal investments in economic, social & cultural capital and leveraged appropriately in order to gain access to opportunities that would be unavailable without such investments (Bourdieu, 1986). Common SES factors include income, investment revenue, employment status, degree attainment, family structure, and institutional- or community-based knowledge (NCES, 2012).

Numerous studies have demonstrated the correlation between student SES and academic outcomes. SES factors such as household income, parental net worth, and parental educational attainment were positively related to students' academic performance (Schlee, Mullis & Shriner, 2009; Thomas et al, 1979; Zhan, 2006). SES has also been found to affect college choice, regardless of academic ability, achievement level, race/ethnicity, or post-secondary aspirations (Hanson, 1994; Hearn, 1991; Howard et al, 2011; Kao & Tienda, 1998). A 2015 report by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) used data from the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS:2002) to examine student expectations of degree

attainment as high school sophomores in 2002 and high school seniors in 2004 by student SES, as well as actual degree attainment by 2012 by student SES. A smaller percentage of high school sophomores of low SES expected to receive a Bachelor's degree or higher (59 percent) compared to high school sophomores of high SES (88 percent). Although expectations for both groups decreased by senior year, low SES students demonstrated a larger decrease in Bachelor's-or-higher degree expectations than high SES students (20 percent vs. 3 percent, respectively). By 2012, only 14 percent of low SES students completed a Bachelor's degree or higher compared to 60 percent of their high-SES peers (NCES, 2015).

#### *Demographic Characteristics*

Personal demographic characteristics -- such as race/ethnicity, gender, locality, and family composition -- are used to determine if there are differences between groups in key educational and career outcomes, including student achievement and educational attainment (NCES, 2009; NCES, 2011; NCES, 2015). Although student scores in mathematics and reading have increased overall since its first administration in 1992, White students continue to receive higher scores on the National Assessment on Educational Progress (NAEP) assessments than African-American and Hispanic students (NCES, 2009; NCES, 2011). The differences in standardized tests scores between students of different racial/ethnic background directly impacts access to colleges and universities, as well as the degree and career options available to students.



Demographic characteristics are often examined in conjunction with socioeconomic status to determine if there are main effects and interaction effects on college and career aspirations. In a 2011 study of the effects of race, SES, and gender on the career aspirations of middle and high school students, Howard et al found significant main effects for student race, as well as significant interaction effects for race x gender and race x SES. While SES was found to impact educational aspirations in middle school and high school students, African-American and Hispanic students presented with lower and less stable aspirations due to their lower SES compared to White and Asian students (Kao & Tienda, 1998). Solorzano (1992) also examined the effects of SES and gender on student aspirations and expectations for African-American & White students and found that, when SES is controlled, African-American students demonstrated higher aspirations than White students in all SES quartiles except the high SES group. Additionally, African-American and White females demonstrated higher aspirations than their male counterparts. Educational aspirations were significantly different from actual educational attainment for both groups; however, the gap between aspirations and actual attainment was larger for African-Americans than it was for Whites (Solorzano, 1992).

#### *Family and Peer Encouragement & Support*

Parents serve as students' primary source of academic encouragement and support during the pre-college years. Parental expectations have been found to be the strongest influences on students' post-secondary plans (Conklin & Dailey, 1981; Cooper, 2009; Hossler & Stage, 1992; Sandefur et al, 2006). Parents also serve as role models for college choice, college attendance, and degree completion (An, 2010;

Charles et al, 2007; Kim & Schneider, 2005). Students also give much credence to the behaviors and opinions of their peers, particularly with respect to post-secondary expectations and college attendance (Cooper, 2009; Cunningham et al, 2009; Fletcher, 2013; Holland, 2011; Sokatch, 2006).

Family and peers have been shown to influence career pursuits from pre-college through the career choice and persistence processes. In a mixed-methods study of African-American teachers' greatest advocates of their career decisions, over half of the respondents cited members of their immediate family -- including children, spouses, and parents -- as being very supportive of their career pursuits (King, 1993). Family and peers also serve as role models for pursuing a teaching career; teachers often cite parents or extended family members who were educators as role models for their own educational pursuits (Williams, Graham, McCary-Henderson & Floyd, 2009). Family and peers have also been shown to have a negative opinions about career choice. In her study of non-traditional female students' choice to enter STEM careers, Torcivia (2012) found that family and friends discouraged their pursuits because of the perceived challenges they would face in a traditionally male-dominated career path. Support networks' opinions about the perceived prestige of certain careers, income, and work-life balance have also been attributed to influencing the career decision-making processes.

Personal factors have been found to have the largest impact on teacher persistence. Marriage, child-rearing, and caretaking of family members have been cited as primary reasons for leaving the teaching profession (Goldring, Taie & Riddles, 2014; Henke, Chen & Geis, 2000; Kersaint, Lewis, Potter & Meisels, 2007).

While married teachers are less likely to leave the profession than unmarried teachers, teachers living in households with incomes over \$40,000 (excluding their own teaching income) are more likely to leave the profession (Gilpin, 2001). Stress and well-being also impact teaching persistence, citing increasing class sizes, teaching low-level courses, highly-demanding workloads, high-stakes student & teacher assessments, and overall burnout of beginning teachers (Hall, Pearson & Carroll, 1992; Hong, 2010; Hughes, 2012; Page & Page, 1991; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011; Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014; Watson, Harper, Ratliff & Singleton, 2010).

### *Background experiential factors*

Background experiential factors represent prior experiences related to a potential career path that may shape career perceptions and decisions. For individuals interested in teaching careers, background experiences include previous K-12 learning experiences and pre-service teacher preparation.

### *High School Experiences*

Academic coursework and overall performance during the high school years directly impact students' ability and aspirations to attend college after graduation. Academic placements in high school coursework are highly dependent upon elementary and middle school performance. Students who perform below grade level prior to entering the ninth grade are enrolled in remedial courses to build basic competency levels. Enrollment in remedial coursework and lower levels of curricular rigor at the high school level have a moderate negative effect on educational expectations and aspirations (Museus and Neville, 2010). Students enrolled in

vocational and general education courses were less likely than students enrolled in college preparatory courses to aspire to receive a college degree (Cooper, 2009).

Limited preparation for the rigors of high school coursework hinders college readiness and, ultimately, college attendance. Advance placement course completion rates, high school grades, and college entrance exam completion rates have increased significantly in recent years overall. While students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds are receiving significantly higher grades and standardized test scores in recent years, the achievement and college attendance gaps persist for African-American and Hispanic students (Posselt, Jaquette, Bielby & Bastedo, 2012). Disparities between the academic performance of African-American and Hispanic students during their middle and high school years has been found to correlate to lower college attendance rates (Roderick, Nagaoka & Coca, 2009). Although high post-secondary aspirations may mitigate the impact of poor performance on standardized tests and low grades, African-American students remain less likely to attend college due to the achievement gap, lower performance on college entrance exams, and recent increases in academic standards for incoming college students (An, 2010; St. John, 1991; Posselt et al, 2012; Wapole et al, 2005).

### *Teacher Preparation*

Perceptions of novice teacher effectiveness are tightly linked to the type and quality of pre-service teacher preparation. There are two pathways to teacher certification: the traditional certification (TC) pathway, which refers to full-time programs sponsored by colleges or education and lead to a degree in teacher

education, and the alternative certification (AC) pathway, which refers to programs that do not follow the administrative, pedagogical, and/or experiential format of traditional certification programs (National Research Council, 2010; Ng, 2003). Traditional certification programs tend to enroll White female students who wish to work in suburban schools; conversely, alternative certification programs tend to enroll more African-American and Latino candidates and those who are willing to work in urban, rural, and otherwise difficult-to-staff schools (Kee, 2012). In her study of pathways to teaching for currently employed public school teachers, Feistritzer (2011) found that fewer African-American teachers received their initial teaching credentials through traditional, full-time teacher certification programs compared to their White counterparts. While only 18 percent of all currently employed White teachers received their teaching credential through alternative routes, approximately 39 percent of African-American teachers completed alternative teacher certification programs in order to obtain their teaching credential (Feistritzer 2011).

DeAngelis, Wall & Che (2013) conducted a longitudinal case study of over 1,100 novice teachers and discovered that teachers who were more satisfied with the overall quality of their preservice program were significantly less likely to intend to change schools or leave the profession, even after controlling for other teacher and organizational factors such as school locale, grade level taught, teacher preparation type, and amount of mentoring & induction support received. Teachers who completed their teaching internships in urban schools with high teacher retention rates are less likely to leave within their first five years of teaching (Ronfeldt, 2011).

In a quantitative study of first-year Norwegian teachers who completed a post-graduate teaching certificate program, Roness (2011) found that teachers were more critical of the relevance of their certification program once teaching in the field compared to their opinions at the start and the end of their programs. Many teachers felt that they were not adequately prepared for their classroom roles; approximately one-third of respondents felt that their jobs were too demanding and nearly half of the respondents cited difficulties working with students. Although 70 percent of participating teachers who were ambivalent about teacher at the end of their certificate program were no longer teaching after their first year in the field, 79 percent of the teachers who stayed intended to remain in the profession for six years or more. (Roness, 2011)

In her study of the impact of specialized teacher preparation on the retention of novice urban teachers, Quartz (2003) discovered that 70 percent of teachers who participated in a specialized urban teacher certification program were still classroom teachers after five years compared to 61 percent of teachers nationally. Eighty-seven percent of the program's first-year cohort remained in the education profession as either teachers, administrators, counselors, graduate students, or in other education-related roles. A similar study, conducted by Tamir (2013) examined the implications of context-specific teacher education programs (e.g. teacher preparation programs for prospective Jewish Day School teachers, urban public teachers, or urban Catholic teachers) on teaching career choice and found that most teachers -- particularly those trained for Jewish Day School and urban school settings -- chose to stay in their schools.

The race and ethnicity of participating teachers was not disclosed for either study, so it is unclear what role teacher race played in teachers' decisions to stay, move, or leave their school settings. Of note, both teacher pools were composed of graduates from highly-selective alternative teacher certification programs. The high selectivity of these programs highlight a selection bias of the teacher education program (seeking applicants with competitive standardized tests scores and a strong commitment to teach in these specific contexts) and the applicant pool (choosing to apply to these programs because of their commitment to the student population and the school context). Given the positive retention results of both studies, these selection biases cannot be overlooked.

### *Contextual factors*

Contextual factors represent the working conditions of the teaching environment, as well as direct influences on teaching performance within a school setting. School characteristics, student demographics, salary and compensation, mentoring & induction support, and school culture have been shown to have the largest impact on teacher persistence and mobility (Ingersoll 2001a, 2001b; Ingersoll & May, 2011; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). The section that follows will examine previous research on the influence of contextual factors on teacher persistence.

### *School and Student Characteristics*

Factors specific to the school demographics have been shown to influence teacher persistence choice. Teachers are most likely to leave schools that serve large proportions of low-income and low-performing students (Hanushek et al, 2004;

Scafidi et al, 2007; Scheopner, 2010). However, mobility patterns differ for teachers based on the racial composition of the teachers and their schools. Minority teachers were more likely to stay or move to schools with higher minority student enrollments, while higher minority enrollments increased the probability of White teachers leaving a school (Hanushek et al, 2004). With larger proportions of minority students enrolling in urban schools, these schools would seem a natural draw for minority teachers. However, the high turnover rates of teachers in urban schools among teachers of all racial and ethnic backgrounds directly impacts student outcomes.

Kukla-Acevedo (2009) examined the influence of workplace conditions on teacher mobility using a nationally-representative sample from the 1999 Schools and Staffing Survey and the 2000 Teacher Follow-Up Survey. In addition to confirming that teachers with less than five years of teaching experience were more likely to change schools or leave the profession than experienced teachers, student behavior was found to be a statistically-significant predictor of novice teacher departure.

Gilpin (2011) also found that student behavior impacted novice teacher persistence, noting that teachers who were physically threatened by a student during the previous academic year were more likely to transfer schools or leave the profession entirely.

Although student characteristics are highly predictive of teacher persistence, the school site itself has also been found to directly impact teacher mobility and persistence (Gilpin, 2011; Guin, 2004; Hughes, 2012; Johnson et al, 2005; Loeb, Darling-Hammond & Luczak, 2005). Buckley, Schneider & Shang (2005) examined the influence of facility quality on teacher retention via survey data from over 800 teachers in Washington, DC, and discovered that the quality of a school's facilities



and resources was more impactful on persistence decisions than teacher salary. In addition, improvements to school facilities demonstrated a positive correlation with teacher retention at a school site. Loeb et al (2005) examined the influence of teacher, student, and organizational factors on teacher mobility in California schools. Their findings suggest that school conditions such as the quality of instructional materials, the adequacy of physical facilities, and the availability of technology was highly significant in predicting high turnover in schools.

### *Salary and Compensation*

Salary is often touted as a reason why teachers choose to leave the profession (Boser, 2011; Gilpin, 2011; Johnson, Berg & Donaldson, 2005). The average base salary for U.S. public school teachers during the 2011-2012 school year was \$52,515 (NCES, 2014); however, teachers earn 14 percent less than other professionals in comparable fields (Allegretto, Corcoran & Mishel, 2008). The 2012 Schools and Staffing Survey data suggest that less than half of public school teachers nationwide are satisfied with their salaries. Significant differences in satisfaction are found between teachers of different racial and ethnic backgrounds; nearly 49 percent of White teachers are satisfied with their salaries compared to 35 percent of African-American teachers and 44 percent of Hispanic teachers (NCES, 2014).

The national average starting teacher salary in 2012-2013 was \$36,141, ranging from \$27,274 in Montana to \$51,539 in the District of Columbia (National Education Association, 2015). The ability to earn more money as an entry-level worker in another field may be enticing to recent teacher education graduates despite

their previous commitment to the profession. Gilpin (2011) examined the impact of wage differentials between teaching and non-teaching jobs as well as teaching work environment on teacher attrition. The study followed approximately 5,000 U.S. public school teachers employed between 1999 and 2005, tracking their employment patterns and earned wages as they maintained or transitioned out of teaching careers. The results indicate that novice teachers who decided to leave teaching were more likely to earn a higher income in their next job. However, despite the availability of higher-salaried job opportunities, working conditions were found to have a larger impact on teachers' decisions to leave the profession (Gilpin, 2011). Guin (2004) advocates for additional incentives to recruit and retain high-quality teachers for high-need areas.

### *Mentoring and Induction*

Mentoring and induction support can help new teachers better acclimate to the classroom environment. Comprehensive mentoring and support during the first year has been found to significantly decrease the probability of changing schools or leaving the profession during the first two years. Teachers who felt that their mentors were helpful during their first two years as a teacher were significantly less likely to change schools than teachers whose mentors were less helpful or did not have a mentor at all (DeAngelis et al, 2013). Teachers who voluntarily chose to change schools left their original placements to find more supportive environments where they felt they would be more successful. They also moved to schools in wealthier, less diverse areas -- not because of the population necessarily but because these

environments were more nurturing and organizationally sound than their previous schools. (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003)

Canadian researchers Fantilli & McDougall (2009) conducted a mixed-methods study focusing on the challenges new teachers face during their first year and how induction & mentoring support played a role in new teacher retention. While finding mentors was difficult for new teachers, collaboration with more experienced colleagues and support from administration proved valuable to new teachers as they adjusted to classroom roles. The authors also found that mentee involvement in the mentor matching process contributed to a more successful relationship between novice teachers and their mentors; conversely, mentors' previous mentoring experience and motivation to mentor can detract from the quality and quantity of mentor support provided. (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009)

### *School Culture*

Despite the availability of mentoring and induction support for new teachers, the professional culture of the novice teacher's school site can prove detrimental to career development. Kardos, Johnson, Peske, Kauffman & Liu (2001) cite three types of professional cultures found within schools: a *veteran-oriented professional culture*, where veteran teachers rarely discuss or work with novice teachers as they develop their professional practice; a *novice-oriented professional culture*, where veteran teachers are scarce and novice teachers do not receive necessary supports; and an *integrated professional culture*, where veteran teachers served as mentors to novice teachers and provided constructive mentoring & collaboration opportunities to develop a culture focused on professional development. Using Kardos et al's (2001)

framework to examine the effect of school professional cultures on novice teacher persistence, Tamir (2013) found that novice teachers in urban public school settings predominantly worked in novice-oriented professional cultures or veteran-oriented professional cultures. Despite a lack of focus on novice teacher professional development, novice urban teachers decided to stay even if they did not feel as supported during their induction period because they felt a strong attachment to their students, the school community, and its shared values.

### Summary

A review of the literature presents a multitude of personal, behavioral, and environmental factors that influence teaching career choice and persistence. Limited research on the experience of novice African-American teachers in urban settings presented an opportunity to add their perspectives to current narratives on urban teacher persistence. The present study used a collective case study approach (Stake, 2005, 2006; Yin, 2009) to gain a deeper understanding of how novice African-American teachers' career self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and teaching context influence their persistence in the teaching profession. This study adds the novice minority teacher voice to existing research on urban teacher retention and provides a better understanding of the unique needs of the novice minority teaching workforce. The findings of this study can be used to develop targeted teacher training, recruitment and induction initiatives designed to increase the number of minority teachers who eventually enter and sustain the minority teaching workforce.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

The present study explores why novice African-American teachers choose to remain in the profession after their first three years of teaching in urban school settings. A qualitative collective case study approach (Stake, 2005, 2006; Yin 2009) was used to gain a deeper understanding of how novice African-American teachers' pre-college, pre-service, and in-service experiences influence their self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and career persistence in urban schools. Using social cognitive career theory (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1994, 2000, 2002) as the conceptual framework for this study, case reports were created from the perspectives of three early-career African-American teachers currently working in urban school settings.

In this chapter, I will begin with an overview of collective case study methodology and why it is most appropriate for the present study. I will then discuss the data collection process, including the types of data that will be collected as well as how it will be obtained. Next, I will describe how the data will be managed and analyzed. Finally, I will outline how I will ensure the reliability and validity of the research findings.

### *Overview of Collective Case Study Methodology*

A collective case study approach was selected to examine the career choice processes of novice African-American teachers as they navigate their first three years of teaching in urban settings. Yin (2009) defines case study methodology as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the

context are not clearly evident” (p. 18). The unit of analysis, the *case*, can be represented as a program, an event, a process, or one or more individuals within a bounded context and is investigated using various data sources to triangulate data analyses (Creswell, 2009; Stake, 2006).

Stake (2005) classifies three types of case studies: *intrinsic*, *instrumental*, and *collective* case studies. *Intrinsic* case studies are inherently interested in learning more about the case itself. *Instrumental* case studies utilize a case as a means to learn more about a phenomenon. *Collective* case studies, also commonly referred to as multiple-case or multicase studies, are instrumental case studies that employ the examination of multiple cases concurrently to investigate a phenomenon or subject of interest. All of the cases selected for a collective case study share a common characteristic or condition which is inherent to learning more about the phenomenon of study. The phenomenon of study in collective case studies is called the *quintain*. While single-case studies have a primary focus on the single case, collective case studies are primarily focused on learning more about the quintain from the perspective of individual cases.

Because the contexts of career choice decisions are highly relevant to novice teachers’ persistence behaviors, a case study approach was chosen as the most appropriate method for the present study. A collective case study approach was chosen because of its focus on the quintain from the perspectives of multiple cases. In the present study, novice urban teacher persistence served as the quintain and novice African-American teachers served as individual cases. While a single-case study would have provided an in-depth look at the experiences of one novice African-

American teacher, a collective case study allowed for comparison of common challenges, supports, and mechanisms that encouraged persistence between cases. Utilizing a collective case study approach allowed the researcher to select cases that demonstrated various manifestations of the quintain to examine similarities while recognizing differences based on each case's particular context (Stake, 2006).

### Participants

Purposeful sampling (Maxwell, 1996; Patton, 2002) was used to select four early-career African-American teachers for the present study. In collective case study research, the number of cases available for study are typically too small to warrant random case selection. Purposeful sampling allowed the researcher to find sufficient cases that met the pre-defined criteria of the quintain, were willing to participate in the study, and could provide information-rich narrative data for analysis (Patton, 2002; Stake, 2005). The use of four subjects allowed the researcher to obtain a breadth of data from novice teachers of different backgrounds while providing a depth of data for each individual subject.

Teachers were recruited through informal social networking websites such as Facebook and LinkedIn by creating posts in groups that target African-American education professionals (see Appendices A & B for recruitment materials). Interested teachers were asked to complete an online pre-screening questionnaire to determine if the teacher would be a viable candidate for the study (Appendix C). The researcher preliminarily screened teachers who met the following criteria:

- Taught in a public school located in an urban area;
- Identified as Black or African-American;

- Had between three and five years of teaching experience exclusively in urban settings; and
- Intended to remain in the teaching profession for at least one year after the study period.

Twenty teachers completed the pre-screening questionnaire; however, only 11 teachers met the criteria for participation in the study. The researcher contacted all eligible teachers to schedule an introductory interview via Skype to formally introduce herself and the study, review the research protocol with the teacher, and determine the teacher's availability to complete all required components of the study. The researcher selected seven teachers of varied personal characteristics and background experiences to provide a varied representation of the novice urban African-American teacher experience based on different pre-teaching influences. All seven teachers consented to participate in the study; however, only four teachers completed all study requirements. Although fewer participants completed the study requirements than anticipated, the final participant count still allowed the researcher to study each case in terms of its own situational issues, interpret any patterns within each case, and analyze findings across cases to provide more insight about the quintain (Stake, 2006). Each participant received an honorarium of \$75 upon completion of the two required interviews and both digital collages.

### Data Collection

In case study research, the most commonly used research methods are observation, interview, and artifact analysis (Stake, 2005, 2006). Since the focus of



present study was on the contextual factors that influenced career persistence decisions that occurred in the past, observation was not an appropriate method for the present study. In-depth interviews were used as a primary data source in order to provide detailed cases of novice African-American urban teacher persistence. Digital photo collages created by each teacher were also used as secondary data sources to determine self-reported influences on African-American urban teacher persistence. Tertiary data sources, such as school demographic data, undergraduate and graduate school demographic data, pre-service internship location information, and present teaching locale information were also be obtained via the pre-screening survey to provide additional context for each teacher's case.

### *In-depth Interviews*

Each subject participated in two Skype interviews between February 2016 and June 2016, each interview lasting approximately 90 minutes. During the “barriers” interview, the researcher asked participants open-ended questions about the various personal, background, and contextual challenges encountered during their early teaching careers; during the “support” interview, the researcher asked open ended questions about the supports and motivators that encouraged their persistence in the field (see Appendix D for interview protocols). The researcher took notes, solicited additional information as follow-up to original interview prompts, and encouraged the subject to reflect on their answers. Both audio and video recordings of each interview were created and analyzed to allow the researcher to note pauses, changes in tone, and body language that may not have been noted during the original interview. The

researcher created typed transcripts of each interview, including personal notes and reflections for further analysis.

### *Photo Collages*

Photo elicitation (Harper, 2002; Prosser & Schwartz, 1998) has been used in previous studies as a tool for garnering additional information about subjects and the contexts in which they live. While in-depth interviews can be used to allow subjects to recall historical events, photographs can be used to supplement in-depth interviews by encouraging the recall of memories and emotions tied to each photograph. The elicitation of recalled memories and contextual influences based on photographic evidence would provide a richer form of data than in-depth interviews alone.

Each teacher was asked to create two photo collages: one collage of pictures representing supports and motivators for remaining in the teaching profession and another collage of pictures representing barriers and challenges to their persistence in the field. Participants were given the option of using an online collaging tool (BeFunky, *n.d.*; Appendix E) or they could create their collage by hand using traditional scrapbooking techniques, printed photos, and tactile embellishments. The researcher created individual paid memberships for each teacher participant regardless of their preferred collaging method; however, all participants opted to use the BeFunky software to complete their collages. In the collages, participants were asked to include at least four pictures of the teacher's choosing that represented pre-college, pre-service and in-service influences on their career persistence. The selected images could have been historical or present representations of various personal, background, or contextual influences. Prior to the "barriers" and "supports"

interviews, the requisite collages were shared with the researcher via an electronic link. The opening period of each in-depth interview allowed time for the researcher to ask questions about the selected images and for the teacher to provide additional background information about each of the selected images.

### *Tertiary Data Sources*

Supplemental information was obtained by the researcher based on contextual factors that were shared by the subjects in the pre-screening survey and during their respective interviews. Information such as K-12 school demographic information, undergraduate and graduate school demographics, pre-service internship location, and teaching locale information was obtained through publicly-available resources available online via organizational websites and databases. This information was used during the in-depth interviews to encourage the disclosure of additional contextual information relevant to the subjects' experiences and as additional content to enrich the researcher's reflection on each teacher's case.

### *Data Management and Analysis*

Interview data was transcribed using Express Scribe Pro software and saved in individual Microsoft Word documents. The researcher created electronic file folders for each subject on her computer hard drive. Each interview and digital collage was saved as a separate document within the subject's designated folder. Notes from in-depth interviews and digital collages were typed directly into Microsoft Word and saved in each subject's corresponding folder within 72 hours of the interview. Data from tertiary sources was saved to each subject's folder as well for reference and

further analysis. All data sources were coded based on the review of the relevant literature on contextual factors influencing persistence as referenced in Chapter 2 (noted in Appendix E).

In collective case study research, emergent themes become apparent throughout the research process. The researcher determined emergent themes by listening for repetitive language and feelings stated by the subjects, listening for resonant metaphors used by the subject to explain their experiences, triangulating data from different sources, and finally constructing themes and revealing patterns based on all of the data collected. Through constant reflection on subjects' experiences in context, the researcher identified common themes between all four subjects while also paying attention to divergent patterns within each individual case (Stake, 2006).

The computer-based qualitative data analysis software program Atlas.ti was used to help code the data and manage themes. Subject interviews, digital collages, researcher notes, and tertiary source data were uploaded as individual artifacts into the software program. The software allowed for the linking of artifacts based on preliminary codes and emergent themes as determined through each case. Once codes were entered into the software and the data sources coded, the researcher reviewed the findings to determine overall themes found within individual cases and between cases. Individual-case and cross-case memos were written throughout the research process to provide analytic notes based on these overall themes with the support from the literature and anecdotal quotes from study participants.

### Confidentiality

The identities of study participants were kept confidential at all times. Pseudonyms were used for all subjects and key participants highlighted in interviews, collages, transcripts, and notes. No real names were used in the reporting of study findings. The names and locations of participating teachers' undergraduate, graduate, and present teaching sites were anonymized for the purposes of the study; however, descriptive information about these sites are provided to give context to each individual case. All subjects signed an IRB consent form which outlined the requirements for participation in the study as well as any risks, benefits, or protections that were inherent to the research process (Appendix F). Pre-screen data, audio recordings, digital collages, interview transcripts, and analytic notes were secured in a locked file and compiled electronically onto a password-protected hard drive on the researcher's personal computer. None of these items were shared with parties outside of the researcher and her research team. All data will be deleted or destroyed one year after approval of the final dissertation.

### Trustworthiness and Rigor

In a collective case study approach, it is important that each case report is an accurate representation of each case's experience, reflections, and interpretation of the quintain of study. For the present study, member checks (Creswell 2007; Stake 2006) were used to confirm an accurate representation of each teacher's experience and the supports & barriers present for each case. Once the case for a teacher was completed, the researcher asked the teacher to review the researcher's write-ups for

any factual errors or misinterpretations. The teacher had an opportunity to provide additional information and feedback for inclusion in the final case narrative. The researcher revised the teacher's narrative based on his/her comments and provided another opportunity for the teacher to review the updated narrative.

Once the case reports were completed, the researcher reviewed the data from each of the cases to determine similarities and differences between the cases. Cross-case analyses were created to provide additional insight into the quintain of study, novice African-American teacher persistence in urban settings. The unique experiences of each teacher was examined in light of their particular contexts and common themes were discovered based on the data received. Additional reviews of the literature were conducted based on any findings that were confirmed or contradictory to the research discussed in Chapter 2.

## Chapter 4: Results

### Introduction

The purpose of the present study was to examine the contextual factors that novice African-American teachers encounter as they navigate their early years of teaching in urban settings. Through the lens of social cognitive career theory (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1994, 2000, 2002), this study examined the personal characteristics and background experiences that framed teachers' entry into the profession, the contextual challenges and supports which had the greatest impact on teacher self-efficacy and outcome expectations, and the ways in which teachers mitigated apparent and perceived challenges to career persistence.

Four novice African-American teachers from various geographical, educational, socioeconomic, and pre-service backgrounds served as participants in the study. Study participants included three female teachers and one male teacher, ranging in age from 24 to 41. All four participants completed a degree or certificate program at historically Black colleges & universities (HBCUs); two participants completed their teacher certification at an HBCU. The participating teachers currently serve as educators in New York, NY; St. Louis, MO; Dallas, TX; and Washington, DC. An overview of teacher characteristics can be found in Table 1.

### Research Questions

The data obtained through this study provides illustrative examples of teachers' choice processes related to persistence in the teaching profession. The

**Table 1. Participant Demographics\***

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Age / Gender</i>	<i>Certification Program Type</i>	<i>Certification Area</i>	<i>Years of Experience</i>	<i>Current Teaching Location</i>
Evelyn	25 / F	Traditional Undergraduate	Elementary Education	3	New York, NY
Tracy	41 / F	Traditional Graduate	Early Childhood Education	5	St. Louis, MO
Sandra	31 / F	Alternative Graduate	Elementary Education	5	Dallas, TX
Terrence	34 / M	Alternative Graduate	Secondary Science Education - Biology	4	Washington, DC

\* Pseudonyms were used to preserve participant confidentiality.

primary research question was: *How do personal, background, and contextual factors influence teaching career persistence for a group of novice African-American teachers in urban school settings?* The following supporting questions were used to guide data collection and subsequent analysis:

- How do the pre-college, pre-service, and in-service experiences of novice African-American teachers influence their teaching career persistence?
- Which personal, background, and contextual factors are most impactful to African-American teachers' choice to persist during their first three years of teaching in urban school settings?
- How do novice African-American teachers mitigate apparent and perceived challenges to career persistence?

Each teacher participated in a total of three interviews: a 30-minute introductory interview to determine eligibility, a 90-minute interview to examine challenges and barriers to career persistence, and a 90-minute interview to examine supports and motivators for career persistence. In addition to the interviews, teachers prepared two digital photo collages to illustrate apparent & perceived influences on career



persistence: one collage focusing on barriers, the other focusing on supports. The narratives that follow provide insight into career choice processes and the myriad of factors that influence novice African-American teacher persistence in urban settings.

*Framing Persistence for Novice African-American Teachers: Four Urban Case Studies*

*Evelyn*

Evelyn Sanders was the first teacher to respond to the call for participants. The youngest teacher in the participant group, Evelyn is a 25-year-old Elementary Education teacher at a charter school in New York City. She is a Virginia native -- her mother a contracts negotiator, her father a retired officer in the United States Air Force. Evelyn attended Department of Defense (DoD) schools from Kindergarten to Grade 8 and completed her high school education at a private Catholic school. She was identified early as a gifted student; she was recommended to enter the first grade at the age of four but her parents opted to enter her in Kindergarten instead. School came easily for Evelyn and she highlighted her love of learning as motivator for entering the teaching profession:

I loved sharing things that I was learning. Whether that's in school or outside of school. There was always a penalty for being smart. Whether it was a social penalty or a physical penalty, like getting picked last for a team or something like that.... I think that has a lot to do with my desire to be an educator, as well as just knowing that everybody's 'glasses' are not the same amount of 'full'. Some people are getting more education than others, and that's an

injustice. That shouldn't be happening. (Evelyn, Supports Interview, May 23, 2016)

Evelyn entered an HBCU -- a historically Black college or university -- in the southeastern United States as an undergraduate student with the intent of becoming a broadcast journalist. On a whim, she attended a Teach for America information session for a free meal and left with a desire to make an impact in the education sector instead:

They talked about the achievement gap and how it was growing. It really pulled on my heart strings. I realized that, even though I was in college with lots of brilliant people, I had a clear advantage over some other people just because of the education I had received. I was like, 'School is something that I was really good at. Maybe I should be a teacher.' I changed my major my first semester of college and started studying education. (Evelyn, Intro Interview, February 5, 2016)

Once she entered the teacher education program, she learned that some female students in her cohort viewed teaching as a short-term career choice before getting married and starting a family. The plans of her peers caused her to doubt her own commitment to teaching and, as a result, she entered a graduate program in business at private university in New York City soon after earning her teaching credential.

I applied to graduate school in New York City to get an MPA. I thought that maybe I could do more if I was working from the outside or working at the top. I went to grad school and maybe after my first week there, I was like, 'I

miss the classroom. That's where I'm supposed to be.' (Evelyn, Intro Interview, February 5, 2016)

Evelyn finished her MPA but quickly started the search for a teaching position in New York City.

During her undergraduate teacher certification program, she was inspired by the community at Children First Charter School, a Harlem-based charter school that was featured in a documentary about education inequality in America. She applied for a position as an elementary teacher at Children First but was hired to teach middle and high school students:

I got hired at [Children First Charter School], but they wanted me to teach ninth, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth, even though I was certified to teach pre-K to sixth. After I'd been doing ninth grade for a while, they were like, 'We really like you. Can you do eighth?' I was like, 'Again, I'd really prefer to do third, fourth, or fifth.' While it was an interesting experience and it stretched me, I had to leave that organization because I knew that where I could do my best work was third, fourth, or fifth, and they weren't trying to put me where I felt like I needed to be. That was what lead me to switch organizations.

(Evelyn, Intro Interview, February 5, 2016)

After completing a full year at Children First, Evelyn transitioned to W.E.B. Dubois Charter School in New York City as a fifth-grade teacher. She was employed at W.E.B. Dubois at the time of the study.

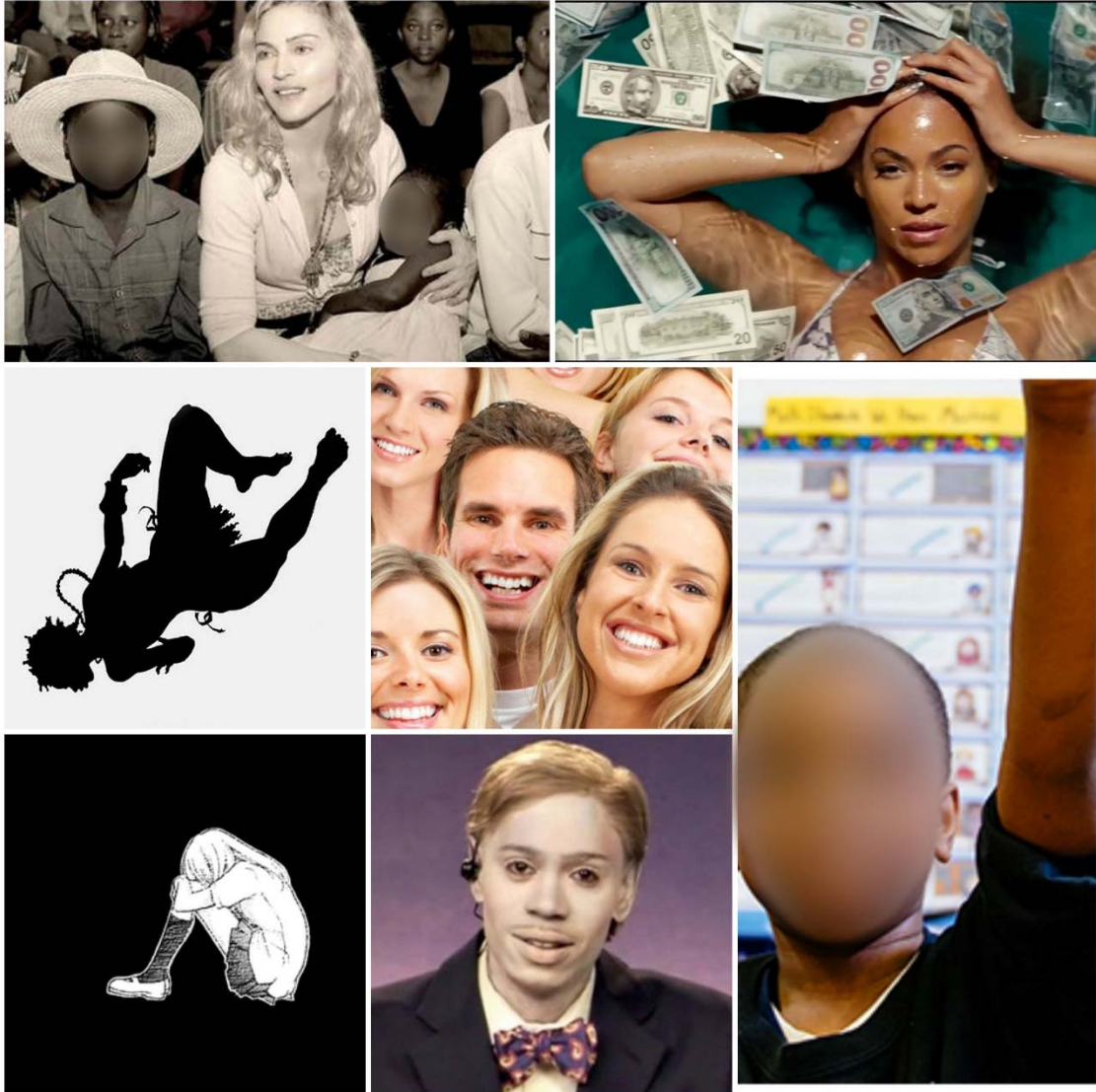
*Evelyn's "Barriers" Collage*

Evelyn began her collage creation process by reflecting on the events and circumstances that caused her determination to teach to falter. Instead of using personal photos for her “barriers” collage, Evelyn used Google to find images that resonated with her. Her final collage was organized to depict the relative influence of her perceived and apparent barriers to persistence -- the most impactful barrier was placed in the bottom left-hand corner of her collage with the impact of each barrier decreasing as the photos radiated outward (Figure 3).

**Loneliness:** Evelyn cited loneliness as the most impactful barrier to her persistence as a teacher. Evelyn chose a picture of a young girl sitting alone with her head on her knees to depict her feelings of loneliness in her work. These feelings manifested during her pre-service experience, when she discovered that some of her peers did not feel a similar commitment to the work of education:

The girls that I went to school with, a lot of them were interested in being teachers until they got married, but there are a few of them who really took what I consider to be the mission of uplifting the race and educating our own. They've taken it really seriously, and I know that [my undergraduate institution] has a legacy of producing educators who really want the world to change. (Evelyn, Supports Interview, May 23, 2016)

She left education soon after completion of her certification program but quickly returned after realizing that becoming a teacher was her true calling. Evelyn views education as a means to lessen the inequalities that people of color experience in today’s societies. As a teacher, Evelyn feels empowered to encourage her students to attain goals that society does not expect them to reach:



**Figure 3. Evelyn’s “Barriers” Collage**

I view education as a gift. Not something that I’m necessarily giving to my students, but something that they already have, that they just need to unwrap. We all have our natural talents and our natural abilities, so it’s really just my job as a teacher to help you find out what those are for you, and help you find the way that helps you best shine. (Evelyn, Supports Interview, May 23, 2016)

Her commitment to helping her students discover their gifts was often impacted by school expectations for student behavior and academic achievement. She has reached

out to her colleagues for confirmation of their true mission as teachers but did not feel supported:

[I am] feeling really frustrated and really alone in my work. Of course I'm surrounded by other teachers, but when I talk to them about the things that frustrate me, I feel like they don't get it. Of course I have coworkers, but mentally I feel like I'm in this work alone. (Evelyn, Barriers Interview, April 27, 2016)

Evelyn's difficulties working with colleagues who did not have a similar mission for uplifting students were anticipated by one of her pre-service mentors:

[One of my professors told me], 'You spend a lot of time thinking, and you expect a lot from other people. You expect as much from other people as you expect from yourself, and everybody is not going to meet that standard. You expect for yourself to treat every student with respect, but you're going to work with people who treat 90 percent of their students with respect, or 95 [percent], but there's still that last 5 percent and that's going to bother you. You have to stay in your own lane.' (Evelyn, Supports Interview, May 23, 2016)

Feelings of loneliness due to differing teaching philosophies led her to leave Children First Charter School and to consider transferring from W.E.B. Dubois to another school at the end of the 2015-2016 academic year.

**“Code-switching”:** The three pictures surrounding the image representing loneliness -- a silhouette of an African warrior, a crowd of Caucasian faces, and a snapshot of comedian Dave Chappelle in whiteface -- collectively illustrate society's

perception of African-Americans, as well as the lengths African-American teachers and students must go through in order to be taken seriously. Evelyn uses the term “code-switching” to reference the need to change her behavior from her authentic self to a mask that portrays society’s expectations for her:

...I'm very aware, especially coming from an HBCU and just knowing a lot about black history, I'm very aware about how black people are viewed in society. That picture represents how I think that the people that I work with can sometimes view myself if I'm not on the ball and how they view my students who don't know enough to code switch between that black and white silhouette and Dave Chappelle in whiteface.... Society views black people as in chains, and ugly, and not put together unless we're this person that they want us to be. (Evelyn, Barriers Interview, April 27, 2016)

She extends the need to code-switch to her students and highlights Brandon, one of her current students, in her collage as an example of administration hiding his authentic self:

When this photo was taken, Brandon was in third grade. He's in fifth grade now. He is on the front cover. He's on the website, the school website. He's also on the front cover of the school's strategic plan. They're always giving out the strategic plan to people. They're always like, ‘Oh, what a handsome young man.’ Then I'm like, ‘He's in my class.’ They're like, ‘Oh, he must be a great student.’ This photo is not what Brandon looks like on a daily basis. I love Brandon. One of the reasons why I love him is because he's his own person. He's one of those students that's naturally cool. Other students just flock to

him.... He doesn't like to sit in his seat. He likes to stand up. He does a lot of his best work standing up. He fidgets, he dances, he raps to himself in a completely non-disruptive way.... The reason why I put Brandon as one of my barriers is because I want to be able to embrace Brandon for who he is, and I want my school to embrace Brandon for who he is, but they only show you the Brandon that they want you to see. They would never put Brandon rapping. The photo that Brandon would choose of himself will never align with the photo that the school will choose of him. That's a barrier for me, because I feel like we're not allowing our students to be themselves or to be the sides of themselves that they're most proud of. Brandon, he could care less about this photo. I showed it to him, and he just shrugs. (Evelyn, Barriers Interview, April 27, 2016)

Although she feels that she and her students need to code-switch for others, she does not need to do so in her classroom with her students:

I feel like I have to be one person when I'm in PD, or when I'm in a feedback meeting with my principal, but I know that I can be myself with my kids as well as be myself around other educators who I feel share my mission....

Those two things come back to loneliness. That was such a strong feeling.

That is such a strong feeling, and a barrier. (Evelyn, Supports Interview, May 23, 2016)

**The “Savior” Complex:** Along a similar vein to code-switching and feeling a need to portray a different persona to the greater society, Evelyn touched upon the compulsion to serve as a “savior” to low-income and minority students. Her collage



includes a picture of Madonna, the pop artist, surrounded by African children to represent the “savior” complex. While she feels that society at large feels that low-income and minority children need to be saved from their circumstances, Evelyn harbored feelings of guilt for possibly confirming to this “savior” complex as an educated, middle-class African-American teacher:

Do I think that these kids need me? Do I think that if it wasn't for me, they would just be out here in squalor? Do I view them as someone that I pity? I hope that just by being aware of that I'm not a white savior, but I worry sometimes that I might be doing something that's actually detrimental or oppressive to them.... Because I'm not from where these kids are from, is there something that I'm doing to them that I think is helping that's actually hurting them? Am I viewing them as separate from myself? (Evelyn, Barriers Interview, April 27, 2016)

Despite her internal struggle, Evelyn views her students as extensions of herself and tries not to think about socioeconomic differences (Evelyn, Barriers Interview, April 27, 2016).

**Salary:** The final image in Evelyn’s “barriers” collage depicts pop star Beyoncé floating in a pool surrounded by \$20 and \$100 bills. She referenced salary as a major barrier to her persistence, particularly because of the relative importance of her work to the future of our society:

Most folks' schools have a chart, like a pay scale, that says after 20 years of teaching, this is how much you'll make. I looked to see if I teach for the maximum number of years and I have the maximum education, what's the

most money I can make? It's \$110,000. I'm like, 'That's okay,' but *I don't like the idea of anyone being able to put a ceiling on my work* [emphasis added] or to say, 'This is the maximum amount we will pay you for this super important work.' There's no pay scale for CEOs. There's no pay scale for doctors....

How can you put a number on my work? (Evelyn, Barriers Interview, April 27, 2016)

Salary was also cited as an influence on her personal plans for the future: "How am I going to have enough money to support a family one day? How am I going to have enough money to retire?" (Evelyn, Barriers Interview, April 27, 2016). While her previous-albeit-temporary departure from teaching was not influenced by salary, her circumstances may change as she considers starting a family someday.

#### *Evelyn's "Supports" Collage*

Evelyn's "supports" collage was structured similarly to her "barriers" collage; the most impactful support to her teaching career persistence was highlighted in the bottom left-hand corner of her collage with relative impact decreasing as the pictures radiated from the focal corner. Evelyn used a combination of personal photographs, student artifacts and images found on the internet to depict her supports and motivations for teaching career persistence (Figure 4).

**Positive K-12 learning experiences:** Evelyn reflected fondly on her K-12 experiences and the various teachers she encountered. The image representing her K-12 experiences -- a Kindergarten school picture of herself -- can be found in the bottom left-hand corner of her collage, her most impactful influence on her career persistence:



**Figure 4. Evelyn’s “Supports” Collage**

I think about all the differences that teachers have made in my life. The fact that I became a teacher is only a testament to all of the fabulous teachers I had. When I look at this picture, I feel kind of the excitement that I felt when I was in kindergarten. I've always been that kid who was like, ‘It's time for school. We've got to get up right now. Mama, comb my hair so we can go.’ That's something that's really never died out for me, not as a student. There's been some days as a teacher where I'm like, I have to know when to call out,

but on the student end of it, I really appreciate that my teachers never put out my flame, or my desire for learning. They always supported me. (Evelyn, Supports Interview, May 23, 2016)

She notes how teachers continued to provide her with enrichment to support her academic growth:

It was obvious that I was gifted, and they would always find extra work for me. 'Oh, if you're interested in this, here's another book.' As a teacher, I know that that's hard, to be thinking of that student who needs something extra all the time, but they always did, oftentimes before I would ask. That is my strongest feeling. (Evelyn, Supports Interview, May 23, 2016)

Evelyn's experience with her third-grade teacher, Miss Reed, served as a blueprint for how she wanted to support her own students:

I had one Black teacher. That was my third grade teacher. She was just so amazing to me.... I'd always been told what to do by these people who didn't look like me, didn't look like my family, didn't look like any of the people that I looked up to. Until I had Miss Reed. I want to be able to be that for another student. (Evelyn, Supports Interview, May 23, 2016)

**Teaching philosophy:** Directly above Evelyn's Kindergarten photo is a picture of the illustration found on the cover of the children's book *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein. This picture represents Evelyn's teaching philosophy, which was discovered as part of a pre-service portfolio assignment required as part of her program:

In *The Giving Tree*, the boy comes back to the tree over and over again. When he has no family, when he has no friends, when he wants to build a house, when he wants to build a boat. Every single time he comes back and the tree never stops giving to him, even when it's like, 'Have a seat on me, because you're old.' That, to me, is a perfect allegory for education. You can always come back to your education. It's never going to stop giving to you. No matter what stage you are in life, no matter whether you're alone, you're making a transition, or things are going great. Your education will be there, and it's the thing that's going to propel you forward into whatever direction you choose to go. (Evelyn, Supports Interview, May 23, 2016)

In both interviews, Evelyn discussed how she views education as a mechanism to help students unlock their gifts. Her role as a teacher is to help her students see their potential and provide tools to help them reach their goals (Evelyn, Barriers Interview; Evelyn, Supports Interview). Similarly, Evelyn views teaching as her gift and she feels compelled to share her talents with the African-American community to uplift the race (Evelyn, Supports Interview). She highlights her teaching philosophy of utilizing and sharing gifts as a major motivator for her to continue her work.

*The Giving Tree* represents my teaching philosophy, which is a support for me when things get rough. I'm like, 'Why am I here?' And I'm like, 'Help them unwrap their gifts.' That's definitely an integral part of my career. (Evelyn, Supports Interview, May 23, 2016)

**Professional support networks:** Evelyn constantly sought support from her administrators, fellow teachers at her school, and other teachers outside of her

immediate network to grow professionally and remain steadfast in her commitment to the profession. The image representing Evelyn's need for professional support was from a one-day professional development conference she attended in February 2016, the Conference on Black Girls and Women in Education. The conference, sponsored by Columbia University, brought together teachers, teacher educators, activists, and young women to discuss the issues facing African-American women and girls in education and how these issues can be addressed.

When I went, it was such a fulfilling experience. I felt really empty going in. I was on the verge of ... Am I coming back? Am I going to keep teaching? Should I go back to school and try to hide out for a couple years? But walking into this conference, seeing all these Black women and Black girls, and just hearing the ones who were echoing my sentiments, who are in exactly the same place I am right now, and kind of being frustrated and unsure, and then speaking to older women who are like, 'Yeah, we went through that, and we made it, and it's going to be okay.' I can't even put a value on my experience of attending that conference. I'm already ready for next year. I would love if they had a couple a year, because I need that. (Evelyn, Supports Interview, May 23, 2016)

She met professionals at the conference with similar mindsets about education and social justice, which invigorated her desire to finish out the school year. Evelyn also maintained relationships with the people she met at this year's conference:

There are women I met at the conference who, we get coffee and we talk, and we exchange emails and letters. That community really ... I needed it. I still

need it. At that time in my career, it was just so on point and on time. (Evelyn, Supports Interview, May 23, 2016)

The conference was held for the first time in 2016, so it is unclear whether Evelyn can participate in a similar conference next year. However, she continues to maintain connections with other participants for other professional development and networking activities.

**Commitment to social justice:** A picture of a clock tower can be seen in the bottom right-hand corner of Evelyn's "supports" collage. Evelyn credited her experiences at an HBCU for providing a solid foundation support for her teaching career and instilling a sense of social justice regarding the educational experiences of African-American youth:

They've taken it really seriously, and I know that [my undergraduate institution] has a legacy of producing educators who really want the world to change -- whether it's a famous alum or anybody who went there to study education. Some of my professors who were alums of the school, just knowing that I come from a long line of people who have done this work before me, and it's not ... That doesn't mean that it's supposed to be easy. Sometimes it's going to be hard, but just know that you're not paving this trail. It's been paved for you. All you have to do is walk down it. (Evelyn, Supports Interview, May 23, 2016)

Evelyn remains committed to paving a similar trail for up-and-coming teachers and supporting current and future alumni along their career trajectories. After her first

year of teaching, she coordinated a panel discussion of recent Education alumni at her HBCU to keep pre-service teachers encouraged along their path to certification:

I had brought back some of the girls who I graduated with. We talked about our schools, how we got the job, what we notice about our school, what things we felt like my HBCU really helped us get ready for, and what things we felt like our school was lacking and that we had to learn on our own. For them, New York was a big part of my success, but they also really just appreciated the fact that there was that student-alum pipeline. They're like, you can reach out to jobs, you can reach out to us for resources.... knowing that there's people ahead of me who can do that for me, and there's people behind me who are going to need that from me eventually. (Evelyn, Supports Interview, May 23, 2016)

Connecting with faculty and students at her alma mater – as a knowledgeable alum or a former student in need of additional guidance – reinforces her determination to persist in the field and provide encouragement to future educators who may experience similar struggles when they start their full-time teaching careers.

**Mastery:** Growing in her abilities as an educator also serves as a great motivator for Evelyn. The concept of mastery is demonstrated in her collage by the image of a woman in a yoga pose. Evelyn finds encouragement in her bad days and sees them as opportunities for growth, likening the experience to becoming a yogi:

I do yoga. I'm not anywhere near as good as this girl, but you're a master at yoga, or you're a master teacher, there is still going to be bad days. There are still going to be days where you're not all the way in the pose. You feel like



your leg can't go any further. Just like there's going to be days where you've been teaching for, I don't know, 15, 18 years, and there's still a student who you don't really know how to deal with immediately. You need to take a step back and think, 'How can I get through to this individual person?' That is that photo... working towards just mastering my craft and knowing that that's out there. I just have to keep working on it, even though some days it feels like I'm moving backwards. (Evelyn, Supports Interview, May 23, 2016)

Even when she attains her goal of becoming a master teacher, she remains encouraged by the prospect of additional growth that comes from continuing to hone your craft:

There's also the idea that mastery ... It's fluid. You can master the basics of yoga course, but that doesn't make you necessarily a master of all of the poses in yoga. I can master small pieces of my teaching, but those pieces eventually come together in a complete mastery. (Evelyn, Supports Interview, May 23, 2016)

Becoming a master educator is not necessarily the finish line for Evelyn but she looks forward to her development for the benefit of her students.

**Respect from her students:** During her interviews, Evelyn noted a few stories from her experiences with students. She was especially joyful when talking about the various ways her students demonstrated how much they appreciated her presence in their lives. Evelyn regarded their respect as a source of motivation for her career persistence. In her supports interview, Evelyn mentioned that she has a collection of drawings, notes, and cards that her students prepared for her and shares

proudly with her family and friends. The respect she receives from her students is noted by the student drawing of her in front of her class, visible in the center of the collage.

When my students are taking the time to draw me and then show it to me, that's their way of showing their love, showing their appreciation and admiration. When [one of my students] gave this to me, I was like, 'When did you draw this?' He was like, 'During math.' I was like, 'You were supposed to be learning.' He's like, 'But I understood it, so I drew this picture.' I love that, and I love feeling like my kids value me and that they don't feel like I'm wasting their time. (Evelyn, Supports Interview, May 23, 2016)

While Evelyn felt that respect from colleagues was also important, the respect of her students was much more important to her. She feels that she can be her authentic self with them and that they can be their authentic selves in her classroom; valuing each other for who they are and their cultural backgrounds was highly motivating for her (Evelyn, Supports Interview, May 23, 2016).

**“Every day is a new day”:** Lastly, Evelyn appreciates the ability to reset at the end of each day, as her elementary-aged students tend to recover quickly from the events of the previous day:

You walk into a classroom on a Tuesday, and kids don't remember what you did on Monday. They don't remember you sent them to the principal's office. They don't remember that you gave them pizza. It's a new day. Especially when they're younger. (Evelyn, Supports Interview, May 23, 2016)

She sees each new day as a new opportunity to try again, to reflect and improve her practice from day to day. She also views the end of each school year as an opportunity to reflect and make plans for improvement for her students and her own development as an experienced educator:

Maybe I didn't set a disciplinarian enough tone in the beginning of the year, so as a result I'm constantly fighting with discipline throughout the year. Next year, what am I going to do differently? Then even when you're teaching a lesson that you've taught for the second or third time, over many years, it's like, next year, how am I going to enhance my lesson even more? Next year, what are my classroom decorations going to be like? What are my class jobs? Just constantly learning from what you did and knowing that come that next August or come next September, I'm going to be there, and it's a clean slate. Even with the kids who get held over. They don't remember what happened last year, so it's a clean slate. I love that. I feel like education is one of the few jobs where it's a very clear start and finish to your work. (Evelyn, Supports Interview, May 23, 2016)

*Next Steps for Evelyn*

Overall, Evelyn has a positive outlook on her career and the impact that she can make on students of color and the African-American community as a whole. Despite her love of working with African-American students, she was offered and accepted a position at a private Catholic school in New York City for the 2016-2017 school year. She expressed some trepidation about the switch and whether her move

to a school with less diversity would be a good fit for her professionally or whether the move would be in the best interest of her current students:

I feel like it's kind of going to be like a pendulum swing. I'm on one side of the pendulum. Now I'm going to the other side. Then maybe I'll find my place somewhere in the middle, but I don't know. I feel guilty now, working with black and brown kids and feeling like I'm not doing all I can to get them ready for the world. I don't know if that guilt is going to get better or worse in this new setting. (Evelyn, Supports Interview, May 23, 2016)

She reached out to her family and friends for advice on the possible move. Her mother, who originally did not support her desire to become a teacher, felt that the move could provide her with additional knowledge that she could potential take back to low-income, African-American students in the future. She also spoke with her partner, a police officer who is very supportive of her career choices and often serves as a sounding board for her career plans:

I'm talking to him about this, and I'm like, 'I don't know what to do. I feel conflicted. Am I giving up on the mission? Am I giving up on our kids?' He was like, 'It sucks that as black educators we have to have this double consciousness. Nobody else is out here thinking about this.... You're personally invested in it.' He was saying -- and this is something I already had in my head too -- 'You don't know what you could learn there, but you could bring that to the kids that you really, really care about.' (Evelyn, Supports Interview, May 23, 2016)

When asked where she saw herself five years from now, Evelyn had several options in mind. She was not sure if she would still serve as an educator in a public school setting; depending on her experiences in the classroom, she may want to become an administrator or open her own charter school. She also thought about possibly starting a career in academia, serving as a professor in teacher education or education leadership. Regardless of whether she is still working directly with students in a classroom on a daily basis or molding future educators with a social justice focus, Evelyn plans to continue her work to help African-American students unlock their gifts and use them to their fullest potential.

### *Tracy*

Tracy Green's path into the teaching profession was not as straight as Evelyn's. The second participant selected for the study, Tracy is a 41-year-old early childhood teacher born and raised in St. Louis, Missouri. Teaching was the family business on her mother's side of the family; Tracy's mother, aunt, and maternal grandparents were educators. However, teaching was not in Tracy's plan when she began her undergraduate education at an HBCU in the Midwest. While there, she completed her undergraduate degree in business administration and a Master's degree in media communications & public relations. She started a job soon thereafter at a public relations manager for a non-profit in the St. Louis area. When she lost her job at the non-profit, a friend who worked as a teacher at a Lutheran School told her about a teacher job opening in a mixed third-grade/fourth-grade classroom. Although Tracy did not have a degree in education nor experience as a classroom teacher, she

applied for the teacher vacancy. She was not offered the position but, approximately one month later, the principal contacted her to offer her a teaching assistant position in a first-grade/second-grade classroom. This experience spurred her interest to become a fully-certified teacher:

I worked there until the end of the school year and I was like, ‘You know what? I have no clue what I'm doing. I need to take some more classes.’ The entire time that I worked on a teaching certification I worked as a teaching assistant until I got certified. (Tracy, Intro Interview, January 26, 2016)

Tracy enrolled in a graduate-level early childhood certification program and completed her coursework while working full-time as a teaching assistant.

Fortunately, Tracy was able to use her teacher assistant work to satisfy her practicum requirement for graduation. Tracy earned her teaching credentials over the course of six years. At the time of the study, Tracy was employed as a full-time kindergarten teacher at a public school in the Ferguson-Florissant School District in greater St. Louis, Missouri.

#### *Tracy's "Barriers" Collage*

Tracy began her collage creation process by reflecting on her first year of teaching:

The first thing that came to mind was the very first school that I worked at in the district that I worked in and that was like that picture initially was in the center because it was just such a bad experience at that place that I felt that that was a barrier because I felt like a failure as a teacher. Then I switched it out and just did ... What I ended up doing was Googling the words and then

just putting ‘teacher’ and they're just things that I think of, the barriers that I think about, like poverty, teacher burnout, classroom management, all those things. (Tracy, Barriers Interview, March 2, 2016)

Tracy’s selected pictures were not placed in the collage in a particular manner or pattern; however, she did use more than one photo to demonstrate the power of the barriers that influence her commitment to persist in the teaching profession. Her final barriers collage included ten images obtained through her Google search that depicted the feelings that engulfed her during her first year and the sentiments that continue to haunt her five years later (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Tracy’s “Barriers” Collage

**Stress and Burnout:** The first theme that became apparent during Tracy's barriers interview was stress and burnout. Out of the ten images selected for her barriers collage, three of the images were specifically tied to her feelings of stress associated with teaching in urban settings. The first three pictures at the top of her collage – a picture of a man banging his head against the chalkboard, a picture of a male teacher scratching his head while surrounded by active students, and a picture of the road sign that reads “Teacher Burnout Ahead” -- capture her sentiments about teaching in urban schools:

Teaching in urban settings, that's pretty much how it feels a lot of times, like that. The teacher burnout I have... We have two more weeks before spring break and I'm kind of done. I'm toast. That's pretty much how I feel. I've only had one experience where it was not considered an urban setting, but then it didn't feel like how it feels. I had the opportunity last school year because I was subbing.... It's not like this. It's not chaos. It's not turmoil and angst and all those words... that's how I feel sometimes teaching in an urban setting.  
(Tracy, Barriers Interview, March 2, 2016)

Although she has five years of full-time teaching experience, her days are equally as stressful now as they were when she began her career:

Being back in the school district and at this school, I feel like it's my first year teaching. To a certain degree, I feel like this is my first year teaching again. As far as with my class and the classroom management, I feel like it's my first year teaching but not as bad. The only difference is I know what I'm doing more so with instruction, and I don't stay late like I did my first year teaching.



I don't get there early and stay extra late. I rarely do that. I'm out the door at 3:45. I don't stress in that way. I don't do that anymore because I know better.

(Tracy, Barriers Interview, March 2, 2016)

Despite remaining in the teaching profession, Tracy often talks about her lack of control and agency in her work. The remaining pictures in the collage reflect feelings of resentment against the infiltration of out-of-school influences on her instruction, the push for teacher accountability, and a lack of support from administration and colleagues.

**Out-of-School Influences:** Tracy was very passionate about the influence of outside factors on her effectiveness as a teacher. She chose four images to include in her final barriers collage that related to socioeconomic status, social issues, and family involvement. Her first selected photo, which depicts a young student carrying the “baggage” of homeless, hunger, and sickness, highlights issues that Tracy confronts every day with her students. The cartoon in the center of the collage, similarly designed with students carrying backpacks labeled with societal issues such as poverty, drugs, and violence as they enter a first-grade classroom, also ties in how the world outside of the school walls impacts student learning:

I feel like in urban districts that's the big elephant that's in the room.... There are things that come along with being in poverty, like the homelessness, like the being constantly hungry, the instability of your household. Many of those things that affect when you come to school and their performance that it's not addressed, but that has a big impact.... That is how I feel about my class. It's a very needy group. There are a lot of dynamics in my class and it's just one of

me. I'm expected to keep all of those dynamics engaged all at once. It's impossible. (Tracy, Barriers Interview, March 2, 2016)

Tracy ties many of the issues that she faces in her classroom to the parents of her students. The cartoon in the bottom left-hand corner of her collage, depicting a three-legged stool with one leg – the “parents” leg – not helping to keep failing schools afloat, symbolizes Tracy’s frustration with parents and their limited involvement in Tracy’s students’ success. Tracy has experienced a number of student issues in her kindergarten classroom this year, including “elopers” who leave her classroom without notice, a seven-year-old kindergartener who bullies the younger students in her class, and a student who cut another student’s hair with a pair of scissors during class. Her outreach to these students’ parents was not well-received:

They go from zero to one hundred very quickly. Because of the [scissors] incident, the parent was upset with me and thought that I should be responsible and wanted me fired. Things like that, dealing with irate parents or not having a lot of parental support on some things. That gets to be frustrating when you don't get parental support. (Tracy, Barriers Interview, March 2, 2016)

Tracy has also had difficulties obtaining parent support for regular occurrences in her classroom, such as the occasional form sent home for signature or help with homework:

It can be frustrating, especially because they're kindergarten so they really need a little bit more parent involvement. I can always tell the ones that the parents are involved versus the ones that aren't, even with something as simple

as homework. I can tell the ones whose parents have been working with them and those who haven't because the ones when I ask, 'Has your mom been helping you on your site words?' 'No.' I can tell because they're not progressing as steadily as the ones that I know their parents are working with them. (Tracy, Barriers Interview, March 2, 2016)

Tracy also noted how parental involvement has an invisible influence on her job performance:

My class has very poor attendance. My class average for attendance is eighty percent.... I have just received my summative evaluation. She's emailed it to me and there was a mention of attendance and I'm thinking to myself, 'Why is there a mention of attendance in my summative evaluation? Why am I being held accountable for them coming to school?' That's on their parent. That has nothing to do with me. (Tracy, Barriers Interview, March 2, 2016)

Tracy resents the impact of parental influence on teacher accountability and evaluations, which have proven to be major barriers for her over the course of her career. Despite her work to improve students' foundational skills, subjective factors such as student behavior and attendance held a significant amount of weight in her teacher evaluations.

**Increased Accountability:** Tracy believes that schools' focus on accountability has hindered her progress as a teacher. The remaining three pictures in her collage highlight Tracy's fear of failure and urge to walk away from teaching based on the feedback received from her principals over the years. Over the course of her five-year career, Tracy has worked at three different schools in the St. Louis area

– two public schools and one charter school. She was laid off after her first year of teaching due to student performance but was called back to a different grade the following year. Tracy reflects on her experiences at her first school and her perceived failure as a teacher, using the image of a teacher writing the word “failure” on a chalkboard to depict her sentiments:

We had data teams and test scores. My class always had the lowest scores and I just felt like a failure and then when I got laid off I really felt like a failure. Then when I got called back after the lay-off, like I said, that school was just a really bad experience. I ended up in a different grade and, after my summative evaluation, the end result was that there was a recommendation that they not offer me a contract for the next school year. So, I did feel like a failure.

(Tracy, Barriers Interview, March 2, 2016)

After her contract was not renewed by the public school district, Tracy transitioned to Aspire Charter School in St. Louis, MO. Tracy reflects fondly on her first year at Aspire where, as a founding teacher, she was given the autonomy to create her own curriculum with her team and focus on the development of her students. However, when administration changed during her second year, a standardized curriculum was put in place and all of the hard work she and her fellow teachers put in place was replaced with scripted lessons and a focus on test results. In Tracy’s collage, the pink poster which reads, “We regret to inform you... your services are no longer needed,” signifies her resentment of her new administrator’s adoption of a standardized curriculum and the needs of alternatively-certified teachers:

What did I go to school for to learn all this stuff? Then I had to think about it...okay, but you come from somewhere. You come from a culture. You have this [alternative certification] culture. They need that. That's what they need because at the end of the day, they are not teachers. They are not educators. They are putting on a façade of educators, so they need a script. I would need a script too if I spent six weeks in boot camp and then went out to teach kids. I'd admit. I would need a script because I wouldn't know, excuse my language, what the hell I was doing. I'm like, I've been doing this for a while. I don't need a script. Give me the standards and I can make it happen on my own. I don't need a script. I was just really vocal about it. (Tracy, Supports Interview, March 30, 2016)

Tracy experienced several confrontations with her new administrator regarding the implementation of the standardized curriculum in her Kindergarten classroom. Her primary complaint was that the new curriculum heavily relied on computer time. Tracy worked in a “switch classroom” with a co-teacher who would monitor half of the class during their computer time while Tracy taught lessons to the remaining students. The teachers would then switch groups to ensure all students received the same amount of computer time and instructional time. This process was used for reading and math instruction each day; students did not receive “centers” time where they could work with each other to learn foundational skills. Her Kindergarten students spent an average of two hours per day working individually on the computer and were not given many opportunities to work collaboratively or develop social skills (Tracy, Supports Interview, March 30, 2016). Tracy voiced her concerns to her

administrator but use of the curriculum & computer time was upheld. In one such confrontation, Tracy asserted her level of expertise in working with young children, given her administrator's limited experience as a teacher and administrator:

She was like, 'Do you think that I don't know what I'm doing?' 'I'm not saying that you don't know what you're doing, but some of the things are not developmentally appropriate for Kindergarten students.' 'Well, I took some child development classes.' I said, 'And I have a Master's degree in it.'

(Tracy, Supports Interview, March 30, 2016)

Tracy received poor evaluations because she was increasingly vocal about her disdain for the new curriculum. Tracy decided to leave Aspire Charter School during her second year at the school due to differences in philosophy with her administration. Two other teachers, both African-American, also left Aspire during the academic year due to difficulties with the new administrator as well. Tracy continued to work as a substitute teacher for the remainder of the school year until she received an offer to return to the public school system for the 2015-2016 school year.

Tracy's return to a traditional public school setting was difficult, especially since she had a positive experience during her first year at Aspire Charter School. At the time of the study, Tracy taught Kindergarten at Truman Elementary School in Ferguson, MO. The school adopted a new teacher evaluation tool, the Network for Educator Effectiveness (NEE), which was developed by the University of Missouri. The tool required six classroom evaluations – one scheduled evaluation and five unscheduled evaluations – as well as submission of a unit of instruction and a

professional development plan (Tracy, Barriers Interview, March 2, 2016). Tracy feels that her evaluation focused on classroom management, not instruction:

That's how I feel teaching in an urban setting, I always feel as though how well I manage the classroom, how my children behave in the classroom, how they walk down the hallway, I feel like that is evaluated more than my actual teaching.... Any time the principal comes in and observes or there's an issue with my students, I always walk away feeling a little defeated and a little inadequate. (Tracy, Barriers Interview, March 3, 2016)

Her evaluations' focus on classroom management was a major source of frustration for her. Although her students are demonstrating growth in content knowledge, student behavior remains the focus of her teaching evaluations:

It becomes tired and it becomes played out when year after year in this environment you feel like you're only rated on how well your students behave but when I'm looking at scores when we take these computerized tests and I'm looking at the growth that they're making or the fact that I have students that are reading, that's not acknowledged...Even the ones that I have difficulties with, it's not as much growth but they're making gains. They're still below grade level, but the scores are increasing. There's growth in all the students but I feel like those things are never acknowledged because I don't have a well-behaved class so that's always a reflection of the teacher. (Tracy, Barriers Interview, March 2, 2016)

Her frustration with administration, coupled with the behavioral issues experiences in her classroom, has led her to contemplate quitting on several occasions:

I ended up quitting before.... Honestly if I did not have rent and had to feed the dog and keep the house ... Sometimes there are some days when I really want to get my personal keys and leave because of the class that I have.

Almost on a daily basis, I quit. That's just how I feel most days. (Tracy, Barriers Interview, March 2, 2016)

Despite these frustrations, Tracy continues to work with her students every day to ensure they have the necessary tools to be successful in the first grade. Tracy sheds some light on the factors that keep her motivated to continue her work as a teacher during our third and final interview.

*Tracy's "Supports" Collage*

Tracy's second collage includes seven elements that depict her motivators to persist in the teaching profession (Figure 6). She began the collage creation process by reflecting on her successful year at Aspire Charter School:

It was just like, 'I'm finally the teacher that I've always wanted to be, that I can be.' It felt like everything came together that year. I hope to experience something like that again. I don't know. That particular year, those pictures... a lot of those pictures are from that year of teaching. I loved the students. I had supportive parents. It was just an ideal teaching situation. (Tracy, Supports Interview, March 30, 2016)

As with her barriers collage, Tracy did not place pictures within the collage in any order or relative importance. However, it was apparent during the interview that the support she received from parents, students, and administrators during her time at Aspire serves as an aspirational goal for her work environment.





**Figure 6. Tracy’s “Supports” Collage**

**Teacher role models:** Tracy credits supportive teachers for her development into the teacher she is today. She was raised in a family of teachers; her mother, aunt, grandmother, and a host of family friends were educators. All of them served as role models for her work as a teacher. Her most impactful role model was her mother, who is shown with Tracy in her Master’s graduation picture in the top left corner of the collage. Her mother taught special education for 36 years in St. Louis Public Schools. Tracy’s mother passed away four years ago and, during the interview, Tracy became emotional when speaking about her mother’s school and her example as an extraordinary educator:

[My mother and my aunt] taught at a school that was built specifically for special need students. It was an accessible building. They had an apartment where they learned life skills. The students, although they were special needs students, they still had some of the same experiences that students in a general ed school had. They had a prom every year. The whole school participated in the prom, not just the students that were graduating. They had a choir. They would do Christmas productions and spring productions. They had a basketball team that participated in Special Olympics. They had cheerleaders. Pretty much everything. Just watching my mother and my aunt go above and beyond for their students.... Sometimes there would be clothes that were too small for me. My mother would say, 'Well, I'm going to take these to school. I have some students that could probably use them.' That's the type of teacher that I'd like to be, to go above and beyond for my students. (Tracy, Supports Interview, March 30, 2016)

Tracy's grandmother was also a stellar example of how teachers can be impactful to their students – even years after leaving the classroom:

I remember when I got my first car. She bought me a car for graduation. The car salesman was one of her [former] students. This man was probably 40, maybe a little over. Her former students looked out for her. People were like, 'Oh, I'm going to take care of you, Ms. Green.' My grandmother retired from teaching in 1987. I have friends that are a little bit older than me. They were in my grandmother's class. They're like, 'Oh, your grandmother...she was mean

but I sure learned a lot.’ I just want to be one of those teachers that even as an adult they remember. (Tracy, Supports Interview, March 30, 2016)

Tracy strives to emulate her mother and grandmother’s examples through her teaching. She shows an immense pride in her work and the impact that she makes on her students every day.

**Commitment to student success:** Tracy chose three pictures for her supports collage that include some of her current and former students. Despite the challenges that she faces with a select group of her students, she reflects fondly on positive interactions with her students. The center picture in the top row of her collage depicts a group of four students with a sticky note which reads “ask me about PIE” on their shirts. Her story about these students demonstrates her commitment to student success:

We were working on an author's purpose. What are the three reasons why authors do what they do? To Persuade, Inform and Entertain. These four little people, I would ask them and they would look at me and go, ‘I don't know.’ I'm like, ‘Really? We've been working on this for a few days now. You mean to tell me you still don't know about PIE? You can't tell me about PIE?’ ‘I don't know.’ I said, ‘You know what, by the end of the day, you're going to be able to tell me about PIE.’ I got the post-it and ‘Ask me about PIE.’ So every adult that saw them asked them, ‘Tell me about PIE?’ Then at the end of the day, we would have evening meeting where the whole school would get together and the principal would ask questions based on what they've been learning throughout the day. She asked, ‘Who can tell me about PIE?’ Those

four were like, ‘We know!’ I was like, I have to take a picture of this. I thought that was pretty funny. (Tracy, Supports Interview, March 30, 2016)

Tracy’s students clearly appreciate her presence. This appreciation – from both students and parents – also serve as motivators for her every day.

**Respect from parents and students:** There are two elements in the collage that depict notes and gifts from Tracy’s students and their parents that demonstrate their gratitude. In the top right-hand corner is a collage of notes and gifts that Tracy received at the end of her first year at Aspire Charter School. These gifts were very important to her because they came from her students and, for the first time, she truly felt appreciated for her work. Tracy also shared an experience where a parent showed her appreciation by helping her students make the “thumbprint tree” depicted in the bottom left-hand corner of Tracy’s collage:

One of my parents, my room parent, came in the classroom. She brought me and my TA a drink from Starbucks. She was just like, ‘I’m going to make a Starbucks run. What do you want?’ I said, ‘Oh gosh, I like hot chocolate.’ She brought us the drinks and said, ‘Okay, I’m just going to steal your class for about 30-45 minutes. Just go take a break. Enjoy your hot chocolate.’ I was just like, ‘Oh, okay.’ They made that and they gave it to us the day before we left for Thanksgiving, the day we went on Thanksgiving break, which I remember because that was also my birthday.... I just really felt appreciated by the students and their parents. It feels good when you're appreciated because it's a hard job. A lot of times, in urban settings, [the appreciation is] not there. (Tracy, Supports Interview, March 30, 2016)

Tracy feels that the community at Aspire were more supportive of her efforts because parents choose to send their students to that school. The school environment was more diverse at Aspire than within the public school environment in which she works now. The diversity and sense of community continue to inspire her to stay in the teaching profession.

**School culture and diversity:** Tracy appreciated the diversity of her class at Aspire Charter School. In her traditional public school settings, her classes were predominantly comprised with African-American students. However, at Aspire, she was able to work with students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Tracy depicts the diversity of her students by including a photo of her students at work during “nest time,” and all-school gathering time that occurred once a week during the school day:

We would work on different, they were called the Five L's, which is kind of like a character education piece of the school. The five L's were Leading, Lasting, Learning, Loving and Laughing. They were doing a poster on being bully-free. They were all working together when I took that picture. I was just like, ‘This is what I've always wanted: a diverse class.’ You had little Black girls with their little braids and the braids. You see little White boys and little Black boys and little Hispanic boys. I had Asian [students as well]. It was just a diverse class.... At one point in that same school year, for MLK Day, I put that [picture] as my cover photo. I put it in black and white because I was just like, ‘That's his dream. That right there, that's it.’ (Tracy, Supports Interview, March 30, 2016)

Although her school was located in an urban area, the student body was more diverse than any of her previous teaching experiences. Tracy believes that this is also a byproduct of school choice, similar thinking to her thoughts about parent and student support. However, her class was not full of non-Black students of color without behavioral issues or socioeconomic hardship. She found that her students were diverse in other ways as well and appreciated the spectrum of diversity among her students:

It's still an urban setting, but it's a diverse urban setting. Interestingly enough, it was diverse in regard to academic ability and to a certain degree socioeconomic status and race. It was just across the board a diverse class. That's the best teaching year ever. (Tracy, Supports Interview, March 30, 2016)

At times, her students had found themselves impacted by factors outside of their control – whether there were problems at home, at school, or within their communities. Despite the many challenges her students faced, Tracy continued to cultivate the talent and potential that she saw in each of them. Her students' resilience despite the odds against them serves as an inspiration for her to do great work in urban schools.

**Student resilience:** During the barriers interview, Tracy shared how social factors outside of the school environment such as violence, poverty, and homelessness influence her students' behavior and academic performance. During the supports interview, she talked about how she gains inspiration from her students

who perform well and persist despite the social baggage that they bring with them to school every day.

The final photo in Tracy's collage shows four young girls posing for the camera as a football flies past them. Two of the young girls were students in her first kindergarten class. The photo was used in a newspaper article in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch a few weeks before our final interview. Tracy mentioned the photo several times during the interview but insisted sharing the story behind the photo after she talked about the other components of her collage. The personal nature of this photo was highly apparent during the interview and she was very emotional when she finally shared her students' stories:

Two of those little girls -- the one in the purple pants and the one with light blue shirt on -- those were two of my students the first year I taught kindergarten. The little girl in the purple pants -- that's the one that's on the left end -- her name is Tamyka. Unfortunately, in August, she was killed. She was at home doing her homework and she was hit by a stray bullet. She was in her mom's room on the bed doing homework. Her mother ended up getting shot too.... I remember her parents. I was just thinking, 'She was doing her homework.' I felt some kind of way because I just remember instilling those homework habits in her. They got a homework packet. I can remember her mother saying, 'We're really trying with this homework, but this is just a bit much.' It was in a lot of the newspaper articles when they ran the story. They were saying how that's one of the first things she did when she got home. She

made sure that she did her homework every night. (Tracy, Supports Interview, March 30, 2016)

Tracy's story did not end there. Despite the tragic loss of one of her students, the focus of Tracy's story shifted to Tamyka's best friend Imani, who was standing next to Tamyka in the photo.

They were best friends and they were buddies in my classroom. They lived on the same street and so the [St. Louis Post-Dispatch] story was just about how she's been coping with the loss of her best friend and then also just how because of the area, the neighborhood that they live in was the area where a lot of the unrest took place in Ferguson. It was in the heart of where the unrest was. Her grandmother is raising her. Dad was killed when she was in first grade. She's experienced two major losses and just how she's coping with that, along with some of the other children in the neighborhood... how her grandmother is trying to help her through that. (Tracy, Supports Interview, March 30, 2016)

Tracy was Imani's kindergarten teacher five years ago but she remains confident in Imani's ability to be successful. Imani's grandmother was heavily involved at Tracy's school and would volunteer at the school when needed. Imani's grandmother wants to adopt Imani but does not have the money to complete the adoption process. Tracy would like to create a fundraiser on behalf of Imani and her grandmother to raise the funds needed for the adoption process.

Stories like this are commonplace throughout Tracy's experiences in urban schools. Nonetheless, Tracy finds inspiration in students like Imani who are resilient



despite the challenges that attempt to hinder their progress. The determination of her students to persist inspires her to persist as well:

I think about students where they don't have the best. They're resilient. Even though [Imani] lost her dad. She's lost her best friend. Her mother is not 100% in her life. She's in and out. She has her grandmother. At the same time, she still manages to make good grades and just be a good student. She's getting counseling and she's able to express how she feels about things. I just think there are so many students like that...that in spite what they have going on, they are determined to excel. That's just awesome. She's destined for great things.... I'm looking to see good things come from her. (Tracy, Supports Interview, March 30, 2016)

Although Imani is not a current student in Tracy's class, Tracy continues to keep an eye on Imani and is determined to help support her success.

#### *Next Steps for Tracy*

Listening to Tracy as she told her story, it was apparent that she is a passionate educator who is fully committed to her students. She plans to stay in the classroom for a few more years to hone her skills but would like to transition into an administrator role at the district level. She has contacted local colleges and universities to determine what additional coursework and experiential requirements are needed for certification as an instructional coach or a reading specialist. She anticipates starting the additional coursework within the next couple of years.

*Sandra*

Sandra Lewis is a 31-year-old elementary school teacher born and raised in Dallas, Texas. She completed her K-12 schooling as a student of the Dallas Independent School District. After earning her high school diploma, Sandra moved away from home to attend an HBCU in the southern United States. She spent most of her free time working with children and youth in the community:

When I would come home and work or when I would work when I was in school, it would always be something with kids. I was a camp counselor, I did basketball camps, I would work with the younger kids. It was always with kids, always with kids. My major was criminal justice. When I got out of undergrad I did this program called AVID in Richardson. It's called Advancement Via Individual Determination and it kind of targets those kids that are kind of flying under the radar who may be the first in their family to go to college who just need that extra push and that extra belief system and that support system to get through college or to even think about what college is to them. I did that. I was also a tutor in that in between grad and undergrad.

(Sandra, Supports Interview, May 19, 2016)

While Sandra enjoyed her volunteer work with children and youth, her dream was to pursue a career in law enforcement. She earned an undergraduate degree and a Master's degree in criminal justice. She applied for a law enforcement job with the Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF). Sandra made it through the multiple levels of candidate screening, completing various interviews,

tests, and document reviews to determine her ability to serve. When she was not chosen for the position, she decided to reevaluate her career options.

Sandra's sister Linda, a kindergarten teacher in Richardson Independent School District, suggested that she enter an alternative certification program to become a teacher. Her sister encouraged her to research. The more she looked, the more appealing a career in teaching became to her. Although Sandra applied for an alternative-certification teaching fellowship, she continued to apply for local law enforcement jobs. A vacancy became available at Linda's school and Linda was able to secure an interview for Sandra with the school principal. Sandra soon started her student teaching practicum at a middle school in Richardson ISD, teaching seventh-grade English class for English Language Learners (ELLs) during summer school. After her practicum, Sandra began work at Rosa Parks Elementary School as a generalist while taking courses towards teaching certification in the evening. Despite having two degrees in criminal justice, Sandra saw teaching as an opportunity worth pursuing:

It started to become instead of, 'This is still my dream. I really want to be in federal law enforcement,' everything started to equal out and be balanced. It was like, okay, I could see myself doing either one. Which one is going to come through first? The opportunity came here and that's when I started. I feel like teaching and law enforcement interest me in different ways. Maybe this was really my path and I just couldn't see it at first. Maybe I wasn't patient enough to see it at first... I don't know. (Sandra, Supports Interview, May 19, 2016)

Sandra has taught at Rosa Parks Elementary School, a traditional public school located in Dallas, Texas, for the past five years. At the time of the study, Sandra was a fifth-grade math teacher at Rosa Parks.

*Sandra's "Barriers" Collage*

For the barriers collage, Sandra began the collage creation process by reflecting on the people and circumstances that make her want to leave the classroom:



Figure 7. Sandra's "Barriers" Collage

Just what keeps me on that brink of just wanting to be done. When I had those days where I'm just like, 'I'm over it.' What makes me over it? Not individual kids some days. Some days it *is* a kid. I'm just like, 'I'm over them,' but then there's some days where I am over it. What is the 'it' that makes me over it? At the end of the year when teachers start asking each other, 'What are you doing next year?', what is that lingering thing that makes me say, 'I don't know yet'? (Sandra, Barriers Interview, June 16, 2016, emphasis in original)

Sandra's collage includes five photos that depict the factors that cause her to rethink her career choice (Figure 7). The challenges to Sandra's persistence include high teacher turnover in her district, the transient student population at her school, the poverty cycle affecting low-income students, standardized high-stakes testing, and her perception of student apathy for their schooling.

**High teacher turnover:** The first barrier that Sandra mentioned during the interview was the high rate of teacher turnover that she has seen at Rosa Parks Elementary School, depicted in the cartoon of teachers passing through a revolving door that resembles a chalkboard:

At our school, our teacher population changes a lot. There was one year where we had to hire 26 new staff members, and within that year... The problem is, working at a school like ours, all the people are really hard workers and are there for the right reasons. We form a support group, and a bond, and a family, and then your family members start to leave. They leave, and some of them find greener grass on the other side. (Sandra, Barriers Interview, June 16, 2016)

The staff at Rosa Parks is a tight-knit group. Sandra recounts how former and current Rosa Parks staff continue to keep in touch even though they may not work together anymore:

We're still friends, so we meet up. It's so crazy. We go to each other's weddings, and stuff like that, so it's all these old Rosa Parks people. Even at my wedding. We took a picture of either you work at Rosa Parks now or you are a former Rosa Parks employee, and we take pictures. It's just huge, and we still hang out with each other. (Sandra, Barriers Interview, June 16, 2016)

Teacher departure impact staff in multiple ways. Not only does the loss of teachers affect instruction and classroom coverage, it also causes remaining teachers to examine their desire to stay. Sandra has found herself reflecting on her desire to stay at Rosa Parks when her colleagues leave:

You hear about success stories from the other side, and you're like, "Man, that could be me. That could really be me. I don't have to stay here for this." Just losing good people really sucks. It really, really sucks. I don't know a better word. You're happy for those people because they're successful somewhere else, but the high turnover, it makes everything new. (Sandra, Barriers Interview, June 16, 2016)

Sandra's school experiences high turnover with teachers as well as students. She notes the transient nature of her student population as another barrier to her persistence in the teaching profession.

**Transient student population:** The student population at Rosa Parks Elementary School is 100 percent minority. Approximately 48 percent of her students

are Hispanic ELLs; the remaining percentage of students are African-American. The surrounding community is comprised of apartment complexes and hotels that offer weekly rental rates. The students who attend Rosa Parks move often – within the neighborhood or to other communities. Sandra explained the three types of student departures that she has observed at Rosa Parks:

There are kids whose parents move around a lot because they just signed a six-month lease to live in the Holiday Suites Hotel, they finally got out, and they move away. When something happens to their parents and they fall on hard luck again, they come back. I've seen that happen a lot. Then there's some kids who move and their parents finally got enough money to have a house. It's moving success stories. You're like, 'Oh, they're good kids.' You don't want them to go but you're like, 'Okay, I want you to go and experience something else besides this street and this mentality.' You feel happy when they leave but then you're kind of sad with those. Then there's some that leave and they come back within a month. (Sandra, Barriers Interview, June 16, 2016)

As a result of frequent student departures, enrollment numbers fluctuate over the course of the school year.

I always tell new teachers here sometimes because they'll ask me. Our classes start off really, really high. One year, I think I had like 32 kids in my classroom on the first day of school. By the end of the school year it's like 20, and they're like, 'Where are the people going?' Some of the people just don't understand. Income tax is a time where a lot of kids will leave. Their parents

got income tax money. They can now put a new deposit down on an apartment. If I'm living in Holiday Suites, I can go move to a better neighborhood. Income tax time is a moving time. Christmas time can be a moving time. (Sandra, Barriers Interview, June 16, 2016)

The changing class enrollment numbers impact Sandra's abilities to set routines and build relationships with her students:

After Christmas break you start your expectations over again because it was break, but then you have some new kids who don't know what we do for centers, or don't know what we do when we line up for specials, or what we do when we first come in for breakfast. You have to re-go over those procedures when new kids come in, and it can mess up the funk with the kids behavior, and stuff like that. That makes it tricky, the kids leaving. You can't keep up with where somebody is. It makes me sad sometimes. I want to see where my kids end up going. Sometimes I get to keep up with them.

Sometimes I don't. (Sandra, Barriers Interview, June 16, 2016)

**Students lacking concern:** Although Sandra misses some of the students who transfer to different schools, her primary concern remains with the students who continue in her class for the remainder of the year. Some students show little concern for her time or their learning, which also serves as a barrier for Sandra's persistence in the field. At the time of the barriers interview, Sandra was teaching a fifth-grade math class for summer school. The students who were enrolled in her class had failed the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) math assessment and, as a result, would not advance to the sixth grade unless they participate in



summer school. Sandra vented her frustration with her student's lack of concern about being promoted:

I understand you're a fifth-grader. When I was in fifth grade I'm sure I didn't know what I wanted to be when I grew up but I knew I needed to come to school. I knew school was important. I knew learning this math curriculum, or learning how to read and comprehend was important, but honestly there are some days I feel like they just don't get it. Like at summer school right now. We had to have that heart-to-heart discussion of realistically why you're here. Some kids will sit and laugh, and I'm like, 'You really think it's funny that you're here, and your other friends are hanging out or going swimming right now while you're at summer school stressing out about whether you're going to sixth grade or not.' They don't get it, and some of them just don't care. They get it, and they still just don't ... 'Whatever.' (Sandra, Barriers Interview, June 16, 2016)

Sandra shared an example of student apathy with one of her collage photographs. The picture in the bottom right-hand corner of her collage is of Destiny, one of Sandra's summer school math students, resting her head on the desk. Destiny would come to school and put her head on the desk at approximately the same time every day. Sandra spoke to Destiny's mom at parent-teacher conferences in an attempt to encourage her mom to put an end to the behavior:

I was like, 'She does this all the time. She just sleeps.' It was the same time every day, so mom was telling me all her struggles at home and stuff like that. I took that picture as a lack of interest. We were doing fun stuff, so the kids

around her would try to wake her up now because they know I would come to her desk and tell her, ‘You need to get up.’ I just feel like sometimes they did not take an interest in their own education.” (Sandra, Barriers Interview, June 16, 2016)

When asked if speaking with parents corrected the issue, Sandra says that she experiences mixed results. If the parents have a history with her, they are more willing to share insight into why their child behaves the way they do.

For example, there's some kids who I've known since kindergarten because my sister was their kindergarten teacher, so if the parents know I've known their kid that long they will sometimes. I feel like Destiny's mom did because we have a history.... She was really concerned, but she just didn't know what to do. (Sandra, Barriers Interview, June 16, 2016)

After speaking with Destiny's mother, Sandra discovered that Destiny stayed up late because her mother's work hours changed to an overnight shift. As a result, Destiny would remain at home in the evenings with her brother without adequate supervision. When their mother returned from work in the morning, she would prepare them for school and then sleep through the day. Destiny's entire life changed because her mother had to change jobs to support herself and her family. Destiny's sleep patterns are a byproduct of the cycle of poverty which Sandra references as another barrier to her ability to serve as an effective teacher for her students.

**The poverty cycle:** Sandra believes that students' apathy for education is tightly linked to the poverty cycle, illustrated in Sandra's barriers collage below the high teacher turnover illustration. As depicted in the poverty cycle, Sandra believes

that students' socioeconomic status dictates college affordability and accessibility. Access to education impacts the range of job opportunities available to students upon graduation, which influences their socioeconomic status. The poverty cycle as illustrated continues from generation to generation based on access to quality educational opportunities and the employment opportunities available based on prior learning. Sandra can see the cycle repeating itself but is frustrated that her students are too young and too far removed from the world of work to understand school's influence on their futures:

I put the poverty cycle on [the collage] because I feel like the kids who don't show that concern don't even know that they're in it, and they're the reason why it's still cyclical. That it's still going in a circle because of their lack of concern, but they don't even know that they're in it, and that they could get out of it if they wanted to, or tried, or cared enough to. I feel like those pictures [of students lacking concern and the poverty cycle] are linked up. (Sandra, Barriers Interview, June 16, 2016)

When asked which of the barriers depicted in her collage impacts her the most, she referenced the poverty cycle:

I think it's just an all-encompassing thing. For example, the job opportunities. For parents, there is a lack of job opportunities because they have a lack of education for them, so our parents are changing jobs a lot.... College accessibility. [Students] just realizing that college is a thing that is possible for them. I feel like the students feel like they are defined by the street they live on.... They don't know anything else besides that street. I don't know. That

circle, I can just see it happening, and my sociologist in me it's just so depressing sometimes. I want to just pull them out of it. I'm doing the best I can with fifth-grade math right now. (Sandra, Barriers Interview, June 16, 2016)

Sandra tries to find a small amount of time during her week to talk about the opportunities that are available for her students once they graduate from high school. She wants to instill in her students that there are more opportunities in life than what they see on their street or on television. Her students enjoy learning more about college and careers, so she tries to incorporate opportunities to talk about the future when the daily schedule allows it.

**Standardized testing:** The final barrier highlighted in Sandra's collage is standardized testing. The State of Texas requires the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) in math and reading for students in Grades 3-8, as well as other content areas in select years in elementary, middle, and high school. For fifth- and eighth-grade students, STAAR tests in reading and math are used as a requirement for promotion to the next grade. Sandra shared her struggle with STAAR and its impact on student outcome measures:

I feel like numbers matter so much. This is my second principal and she was really numbers heavy. She would do spreadsheets. She didn't like math. She wasn't a math person. She was a reading person, but spreadsheets were her thing. She was big on numbers. In Texas, you either are 'Met Standard' or 'Needs Improvement' as your school rating. She came from a school that was at 'Needs Improvement,' so the state comes in. The district first comes in and

tries to change up some stuff. It's very intrusive. Then the state will come in too. Our school met standard but we were close to not meeting standard. She was like, 'We don't want that to happen,' so she came in as very numbers-driven, numbers-heavy, or whatever, but not really seeing the relationship with the kids and the growth within the kids. (Sandra, Barriers Interview, June 16, 2016)

Sandra recognizes the district's focus on test scores, which trickles down to individual principals and the accountability measures they are required to meet.

The accountability is so high for them sometimes. I can always tell when there's a principal meeting because they'll come back, and they look all sad and upset, and the next meeting we have with them we get the same lecture and talk that they got. If they got chewed out the meeting or are asked, 'Why aren't your scores high enough,' they're going to come back and ask us the same questions. (Sandra, Barriers Interview, June 16, 2016)

STAAR tests are a frustration to teachers and students as well. Although the tests are created to gauge students' understanding of grade-level content, students below grade level are not prepared to complete STAAR tests at a satisfactory proficiency level and teachers receive poor projected passing rates based on their students' prior performance:

They make those test really, really hard for the kids. They stress out about the tests. They always start on questions that we haven't taught yet.... This year, there were 13 questions that I hadn't covered in class that were on our benchmark. My projection levels are always really, really low, so the first

couple years it used to make me really upset.... I feel like that first couple of times that happened it frustrated me. They made me mad. So upset that I wanted to cry. I was just angry, and balling my fists that we would base everything off these test scores, and what you're projecting me to be like. When I blow it out the water, you still want more or it still wasn't good enough. (Sandra, Barriers Interview, June 16, 2016)

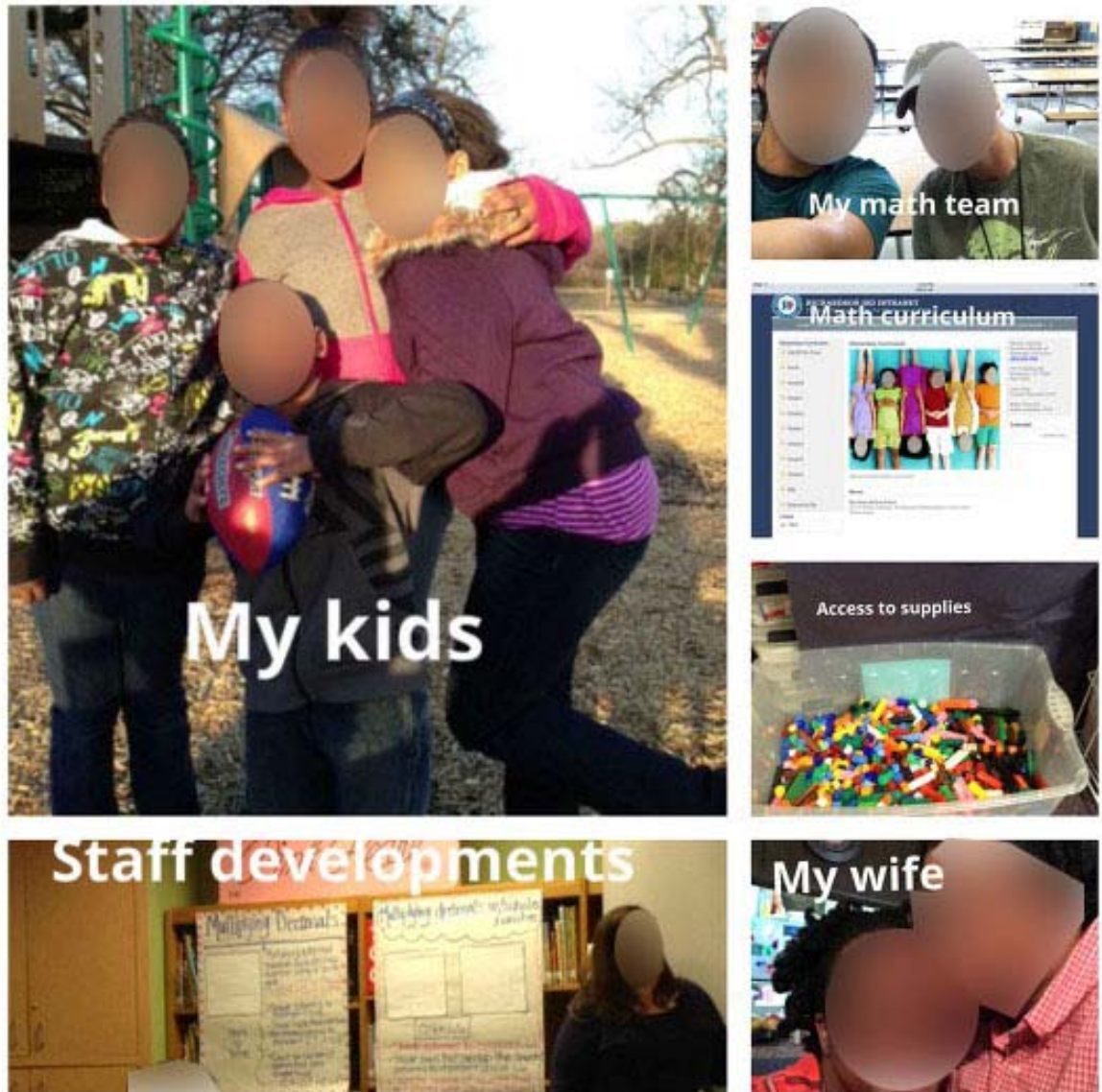
Despite her frustration with the STAAR, Sandra remains steadfast in her commitment to her “friends,” the students she serves. The STAAR data is only a small piece of the evaluation puzzle. Sandra has a truer picture of her students’ performance and growth based on her daily interactions with them and her own commitment to student success.

It can be very frustrating when you feel like everything is numbers driven, but I have to say to myself -- and I learned this from Hannah, one of the teachers in my department -- ‘Did you go in there and do the best that you could every day, Sandra? If you can say yes to that than it doesn't matter what those scores say.’ I learned that over the years that I stayed. (Sandra, Barriers Interview, June 16, 2016)

Sandra’s colleague, Hannah, serves as one of the various supports that encourage Sandra to stay at Rosa Parks and to continue teaching in urban schools.

#### *Sandra’s “Supports” Collage*

Sandra’s support collage includes six images that highlight the factors that keep her motivated to stay at Rosa Parks Elementary School (Figure 8). Sandra began her collage creation process by thinking about her persistence at Rosa Parks



**Figure 8. Sandra’s “Supports” Collage**

specifically, not her teaching career in general. All of her full-time teaching experience was earned at Rosa Parks; she has not transferred to another school since joining Rosa Parks in 2011. Sandra’s collage highlights four factors that contribute to her persistence in the teaching profession: her family, her colleagues, access to high-quality professional development, and the implementation of a districtwide math curriculum.

**Sandra's family:** Sandra's family is the greatest influence on her teaching career persistence. Sandra's wife, Melanie, is included in one of the photos in the supports collage. Melanie is a Reading/Language Arts teacher at a magnet school in a neighboring school district. The couple has four kids – ages 14, 13, 12 and 9 – and their children are featured in the largest photo in the collage. Providing financial support to her family is a primary motivator for Sandra:

I have to earn money. I want to support to my family. I don't want my kids to ever have to want for anything, so I come every day and I try to work as hard as I can so that money doesn't run out. I don't want to ever put that in jeopardy for them because that would be a really bad spot for us to be in if something were to happen to mine or even my wife's employment. That's the first things. It seems really petty, but it's very honest. I need to be honest and that's why I come to work every day. I work summer school and I work Saturday school. I always want to have something put away just in case something was to happen. (Sandra, Supports Interview, May 19, 2016)

Sandra credits her wife for keeping her focused on her career. Melanie serves as an emotional support and example of career persistence:

She just keeps me motivated to work hard. She's a teacher too. She actually graduated later in life. She graduated a year and a half ago now. She was an aide, she drove buses before we even met. She always worked hard and tried to do the best by the kids. She set that example when we got together, it's non-negotiable to not do the same, pretty much. She drives me to be better, to be



my best. Even when I'm low, she drives me to be my best. (Sandra, Supports Interview, May 19, 2016)

Sandra consults with her wife about her job, serving as a sounding board for her when work becomes challenging. Melanie has a first-hand understanding of the various challenges of being a teacher in Dallas and, as such, can provide a higher level of support to Sandra when she struggles with the intricacies of her work.

**Sandra's colleagues:** Sandra also views her math team as a source of support and motivation as a teacher. In the top right-hand corner of her collage, Sandra displays a photo of her team members. Her team includes Hannah, a math instructional coach, and Erin, a math specialist. When Sandra joined the Rosa Parks teaching staff, Hanna was her instructional coach. Sandra reflects fondly on how she and Hanna first met:

When I got here, Hannah was actually the fifth-grade math teacher. She got moved up to math specialist three days before school started. I came and interviewed and I took her job. Luckily, she had already set up the classroom and everything so I just literally came and took her room and took over her job. She was the first math specialist I had and she is probably the nicest person I know. I make a joke and say, 'When I grow up I want to be like you, Hannah.' Even if she wasn't good at her job, she's just such a genuinely nice person. If I need someone to pray for me, that's the first person I go to. I just feel, I don't know, her spirit is just extraordinary. She's helped me along my way. I wouldn't have made it through my first year probably without her. (Sandra, Supports Interview, May 19, 2016)

Erin joined the math team when Hannah was promoted to instructional coach.

Erin is probably the smartest person I know. She comes up with so many ideas that I would have never thought of. Now, we're kind of at a level -- this is our 3rd year working together -- where we bounce stuff off of each other. I'm just learning from her because she can differentiate anything. She's just amazing and we just kind of click and we just work really, really well together.

(Sandra, Supports Interview, May 19, 2016)

The congeniality between Sandra, Hannah, and Erin makes Rosa Parks a pleasant place to work for Sandra. Sandra credits her persistence to Hannah and Erin because they provide key support to her as she transitioned into her role as a math teacher:

They make my life and teaching math so easy. I tell them when they miss a day, it makes my day ... I have a bad day when y'all aren't here because the flow is not the same thing. I'm really, really fortunate to work with those two. I went to staff development before and I was like, 'I hate to say this out loud but my math specialist is better than y'all's.' I know it was rude but I had to say it because I just feel like I'm in a good spot. (Sandra, Supports Interview, May 19, 2016)

**Curriculum resources:** As a new teacher, access to quality resources was very important to Sandra. Sandra's school district, Richardson Independent School District, provides a standardized math curriculum to all teachers across the district. She gives high praise to the district for the content and rigor of the math curriculum:

Our curriculum in math, I think, is probably the best. They try to really put the differentiation piece in there, but you still have to do your own part for your

class but they give you a really, really good foundation in the lessons. I have teachers who leave the district and still use themes from the district because the rigor is there and they give you so much. When I get a lesson, because my students are ... the range is so different in our district that's there some stuff that my kids just can't do and I have to break it into chunks, cut into different pieces, differentiate it however I can so my kids can get to that point. They put a lot in there so you have to pick out what the meat of the lesson is my kids can get to where they need to. (Sandra, Supports Interview, May 19, 2016)

Sandra is thankful for the curriculum that is provided to her by the district. Her sister Linda works as a teacher in a neighboring district. Unfortunately, Linda does not receive the same curricular support that Sandra receives at Rosa Parks. The curriculum at Linda's disposal is not as rigorous as the curriculum at Rosa Parks and Sandra credits the curriculum for giving her students the support they need to meet proficiency standards on the STAAR and feel prepared for sixth-grade content.

**Professional development:** Sandra appreciates the district's commitment to professional development for its teachers. Richardson ISD teachers are required to complete 18 hours of professional development every school year. Sandra chose to highlight the staff development workshops in her collage by using a photo of some of the resources she received at a workshop during the previous academic year.

I always go to the math focused ones and they're really good.... They have some for new teachers and experienced teachers and then they have math specialists who lead it, so you get to go over the strategies and it just depends on the different one. You get to go through the strategies. They have different

anchor charts that you can use, so I take a lot of pictures, so that's why I had that. When it's a good [session], you feel really fortunate. (Sandra, Supports Interview, May 19, 2016)

Sandra found professional development sessions particularly helpful when she was assigned a science class during the previous school year:

When I taught science last year, those were really, really helpful for me because the content wasn't there like it is for math for me. Going to those staff developments helped me become a better science teacher for my kids.

(Sandra, Supports Interview, May 19, 2016)

In addition to the professional development sessions offered throughout the academic year, Sandra enjoyed participating in an incentive program designed to promote the retention of new teachers within the district. The district selects schools to participate in the program based on the teacher turnover rates for the previous school year. As Sandra mentioned during the barriers interview, she has seen a tremendous amount of turnover over the course of her career at Rosa Parks. Her school has participated in the incentive program during her second, third, and fourth year of teaching at Rosa Parks. Through this program, Sandra grew as an educator and later provided the same support to newer teachers in the district:

I started off as just a career teacher in the program, which is just pretty much a classroom teacher, but then by the end of the program I was a mentor teacher so I got to go do evaluations on other teachers and I got to help them come up with strategies to improve their [STAAR] scores and things like that. The program was beneficial to me. (Sandra, Supports Interview, May 19, 2016)

The financial and advancement incentives for participating in the program was also a motivator for Sandra to finish her years at Rosa Parks:

Having the extra money was good. If you stayed, you got your money the next year. I think the most I got was 4,000 extra dollars. Also I got to be a mentor teacher which was good on my resume, so I'm in the pool to be a math specialist now. That also helped out. Those were the things that kept me here a little bit longer. I was like, 'You know what, I could move but I would miss that check.' (Sandra, Supports Interview, May 19, 2016)

During the 2015-2016, the incentive program was redesigned to boost teacher retention in high-risk schools. Rosa Parks is no longer eligible to participate in the program; however, the program and its incentives kept Sandra motivated to stay at Rosa Parks and be successful as a teacher.

#### *Next Steps for Sandra*

Sandra has her eyes set on becoming a math specialist in the near future but wants to give herself an opportunity to learn more about the role from Erin and see if becoming a math specialist is the right fit for her. Sandra enjoys working with students and does not want to lose that connection with her "friends" if she transitions into a coaching role. Sandra is willing to transfer schools for a math specialist role as long as she finds a good fit with the new principal and their respective visions of the math specialist role are well-aligned.

At the end of our final interview, I asked Sandra about the possibility of changing careers to pursue a career in law enforcement as she originally intended:

Melanie and I talked about the law enforcement dream. I feel like it's further away sometimes. Teaching's not that bad. I'm not like, 'Ugh. I'm still teaching. Oh, my God.' I don't go into I like that. I'm ill that I'm still teaching summer school right now. That sucks, but this whole teaching thing is not that bad. I don't see myself in a rush to leave it. It's stable, and I'm not bad at it. I'm pretty good at it actually, and I enjoy it. There are some rewards that this brings that no other job can. Maybe I'm just meant to save lives in a different way, without a badge. You know? (Sandra, Barriers Interview, June 16, 2016)

### *Terrence*

Terrence Johnson, the last teacher selected for the study, also holds the distinction of being the only male participant and the only secondary teacher profiled in the present study. Terrence is a 34-year-old secondary science teacher born and raised in New Orleans, Louisiana. Terrence's mother is a school teacher; his father works as a retail manager. Growing up, Terrence seemed destined to become a teacher:

It was what I was born to do. When kids played with toys, I played with textbooks. No literally. I played with textbooks. I always wanted to be a teacher because even though my teachers taught me I always had to go home and reteach myself. I would have to break it down into simplest of terms and then build it back up so I can have the academic vocabulary. I was like, 'Well, if I was a teacher, I would do this and I would do that.' I would teach everything in the textbook and they would be doing all of this. It was something that was innate in me. (Terrence, Supports Interview, June 3, 2016)

When Terrence went to college, however, he entered school as a psychology major. He changed his major multiple times – from psychology to pre-med to education. When he told his family about his desire to become a teacher, they were not supportive of his decision. His mother -- a middle school reading teacher in New Orleans – was particularly concerned about Terrence’s career choice:

My mom did not like that because it's no money. This was in Louisiana. No money. This was pre-Michelle Rhee [former chancellor of DC Public Schools] .... My family would be like, "But you're so much smarter than that." I'm like, "What are you talking about?" My mom was not having it, but I was going to bypass her disapproval and do it. (Terence, Supports Interview, June 3, 2016)

He changed his major to education but only stayed in the teacher education program for one year. When he found his passion for science, he changed his major again and completed his undergraduate degree in molecular biology.

After graduation, Terrence accepted a job with a large corporate science firm. Although he excelled in his work, he still had a desire to teach. He quit his corporate work and began working for a non-profit. While at the non-profit, he became a mentor for the Big Brother, Big Sister Program. Once a week, he would help his Little Brother with his homework. His Little Brother saw improvement in his reading scores, which reinforced Terrence’s desire to teach on a larger scale. Soon, Terrence found a part-time job teaching science courses for an online university. He enjoyed his evening teaching job more than his daytime non-profit work. When he realized

that his heart was not in his day job, Terrence started looking into graduate-level programs to become a certified teacher.

At first, Terrence was discouraged by all of the requirements and concessions he had to make in order to become a teacher:

Whenever I expressed a desire to teach, there were so many hoops a person has to jump through... you have to be certified, you have to have all of these classes, blah, blah, blah. Then you'll be starting in making \$30,000, you know? I was like, 'I can't do that.' (Terrence, Supports Interview, June 3, 2016)

He moved to Washington, D.C., to pursue new job opportunities. While in the city, Terrence heard an advertisement on the radio recruiting prospective teachers for an alternative certification program at a local university. Since his non-profit salary was only \$40,000, he decided to take his chance and look for teaching programs that covered his tuition and paid a salary while working as a full-time teacher:

I went to [a university in the metropolitan DC area] and I went to the informational. You're going to be hired as a part-time teacher, but you can't do anything else because you must take classes and everything else and then, after a year, you have your certification. I can't live off of \$20,000. That's just not going to happen. Another university had a similar ad and I went to their informational. If you want to take one month of summer classes, that fall you'll be a full-time teacher making a full-time salary with DCPS. I thought, 'Yes!' I took it and I got a \$30,000 raise. That's how it all happened. (Terrence, Supports Interview, June 3, 2016)



Terrence entered an alternative graduate certification at an HBCU in the metropolitan DC area that paid for his tuition and paid a full-time teacher's salary in exchange for a five-year commitment to teach in urban schools. With his undergraduate degree in molecular biology, Terrence pursued his teacher certification in Secondary Science Education. At the time of the study, Terrence taught high school biology at Frederick Douglass High School in Washington, DC and was finishing his fourth year of teaching in urban schools.

#### *Terrence's "Barriers" Collage*

Terrence's barriers collage contains four images, demonstrating the challenging factors that frame his work as an educator in Washington, DC (Figure 9). When asked about his collage creation process, Terrence cited four barriers to his persistence: the diversity of students & staff, school politics, students' perception of "easy" teachers, and inadequate training for teachers and administrators.

**Diversity:** Throughout Terrence's interviews, it was apparent that diversity is always at the forefront of his mind. He began the barriers interview by talking about his first teaching appointment as a biology teacher at Potomac High School, whose population was approximately 60 percent African-American and 35 percent Hispanic. The race dynamic at his new school forced him to examine the impact of racial and socioeconomic diversity on his role as a teacher:

The first principal I had was a Black male. He hired an all-Black science team because the year before, his whole science team quit. The entire science team quit. He felt that they were not able to reach the black students. From there, it



**Figure 9. Terrence’s “Barriers” Collage**

was like, ‘Whoa,’ because I went to a private school. I went to a Catholic school from [Grade] 6 to [Grade] 12. A lot of these experiences that these kids are having, I wasn't able to relate to. That made it a little bit difficult.

Condoleezza [Rice] writes in her book that even though people don't feel that she is part of the struggle and she may not have had all the struggles, but she is still part of the struggle. That's what I felt but it was hard to relate to some of the students because I didn't have those same experiences as they did. I may

look like them but don't have the same experiences. (Terrence, Barriers Interview, June 16, 2016)

Terrence was aware of his privilege as an African-American male who did not attend public school for his high school years. He grappled with this privilege as he was placed in classrooms that were majority low-income, African-American students. Given his principal's concern that his prior teachers were not effective with the predominantly African-American student population at Potomac, Terrence was not surprised that he was given classes that served mostly African-American students. To start, he was assigned a science course for the Freshman Academy, a support program designed to support ninth-grade students at risk of poor performance as they transitioned from middle school to high school. Out of 60 enrolled students, only one of his students were White. One of his colleagues, a White male science teacher who also taught a Freshman Academy course, spoke to Terrence about teaching Freshman Academy students:

One of the white teachers who were in the Freshman Academy just said, 'Look, you know what? I don't feel bad about saying it, but I'm not the type of teacher to teach these type of kids.' It was like, 'Whoa.' That's when I really felt my race. (Terrence, Barriers Interview, June 2016)

Students were similarly scheduled for Terrence's classes when he transferred to Frederick Douglass High School after two years of teaching at Potomac. Counselors encouraged African-American students to take Terrence's class because it would be an easy course. Terrence felt that African-American students were dumped

into his class because other teachers on his team would not be able to handle a class full of African-American male students:

The counselors told the students, ‘This is going to be a really easy class. It’s going to be an easy A.’ It was a senior-level course. You are all going to be going on field trips and going on different excursions.’ But nobody never talked to me to see what the class was about. They came in there with the mentality like this is going to be easy but it was mainly the black students who didn’t want to take Physics. They were dumped in to my class because ‘he can handle the black males.’ I’m telling you... I *can* but it’s a lot of work. While I can do it, you are exhausting me versus spreading them around and training everybody on how to do it. It’s difficult. It’s very much so difficult. (Terrence, Barriers Interview, June 16, 2016, emphasis in original)

The biology teaching staff at Frederick Douglass does not reflect the demographic makeup of the student body. All of the teachers on the biology team besides Terrence are White females. While the chemistry, physics, and medical sciences teams are more racially diverse, Terrence recognizes that the burden of teaching the lowest-performing students – who happen to be students of color – are often tracked to classes that are led by minority teachers.

**Politics:** School politics came into play during Terrence’s tenure at Potomac High School. Prior to starting his teaching career, Terrence was not aware how relationships with teachers and administrators could impact his development as a teacher or potential opportunities for advancement. Terrence was fortunate to have a highly supportive mentor during his first two years of teaching in urban schools:

When I started at Potomac, I had a fabulous mentor. Her name was Sarah Payne. She took me under her wing, it was amazing. She would train me. She would show up in my classroom. She would give advice. She would model lessons. She would take my tests and give me feedback on it -- everything. She was amazing. (Terrence, Barriers Interview, June 16, 2016)

When Ms. Payne informed Terrence during his second year that she planned to transition into a principalship for the following school year, Terrence was concerned. Given the support that he received from her during his time at Potomac, he was afraid that he would not be able to receive the same kind of mentorship that Ms. Payne provided to him. Terrence told Ms. Payne in confidence that he would follow her to her new position because he valued her support. Unbeknownst to him, Ms. Payne told her principal about her plans and that Terrence was going to leave with her. Ironically, Ms. Payne did not have a job offer yet; in fact, it was too early in the school year to begin the interview process. While Terrence understood that Ms. Payne informed their principal out of respect, the news complicated Terrence's relationship with his principal.

Terrence set up a meeting with the principal to explain his situation. Mr. Jones, principal at Potomac High School, was not reticent about own feelings of betrayal upon hearing Terrence's news:

He's really big on loyalty. He thought I was disloyal by saying that, but I was like ... Out of all the assistant principals there, she's the one that trains me the most. She's the one that knows my teaching style. She's the one that stays after school with me. She's the one that comes in early with me. She's the one that

pushes me. [Mr. Jones] said, 'You know what? You are a man of faith. Just take a leap of faith and go.' I was like, 'Well, what if she doesn't get a principalship? What happens to me? What if she's hit by a bus tomorrow? What happens?' He said, 'Young man, tie your shoes and get to going.'

(Terrence, Barriers Interview, June 16, 2016)

Terrence felt pushed out of his position because of his perceived loyalty to another administrator. Ms. Payne was not offered a principalship for the following school year. Terrence did not resign from Potomac and Mr. Jones did not terminate his employment there; however, Terrence did not feel that his relationship with Ms. Payne and Mr. Jones would be the same after the preemptive transfer announcement. At the end of the school year, Terrence accepted a position teaching summer school at Frederick Douglass. They loved him so much that they offered him a position for the following school year, which he accepted. Terrence learned a valuable lesson from his experience with Ms. Payne and Mr. Jones at Potomac:

Ms. Payne is still my mentor but after that conversation ... the rule is you keep that between you and then when you get the job, that's when you send for me, not the other way around. (Terrence, Barriers Interview, June 16, 2016)

Terrence is experiencing similar political issues at his present school, Frederick Douglass High School. He is now in his second year of teaching at Frederick Douglass, where he teaches biology elective courses. He has a strained relationship with his Assistant Principal, Latrice Baxter, because he is not receiving the same type of feedback and support that he received from Ms. Payne at Potomac. Terrence does not feel that Assistant Principal Baxter has enough knowledge in biology to

adequately evaluate his performance as a teacher and does not spend enough time observing his work to provide constructive feedback on his teaching methods. Their differing opinions on his work caused a strain on their relationship.

During Terrence's first year at Frederick Douglass, he taught an upper-level biology elective course which he designed himself. His class was very popular during his second year – not only because of the content but Terrence also had a great rapport with his students. Shortly before our interview, one of Terrence's colleagues in the biology department informed him that Assistant Principal Baxter offered him Terrence's course for the following school year. Given Terrence's success with the course and student performance, he felt blindsided by the admission from his colleague. He immediately requested a meeting with Assistant Principal Baxter to find out why he was losing his class and to address any recent changes that were jeopardizing their relationship:

When I sat down in her office, the first thing she said was, 'I received your email. Anything that has changed, it's you. Anything that's off-kilter is what you're feeling because I haven't changed.' I guess I should have said, 'You know what? Why don't we table this until things are cooler,' but I sat there for 37 minutes and listened to that. After that, she was like, 'You're challenging me.' I'm like, 'No, I'm not. I want to get better. I'm trying to get better and I see that our relationship is not where it was. I would like for us to get back on track with it.' She previously offered him the class but now I have the class. The class is an advanced class. She has turned it into an inclusion class.  
(Terrence, Supports Interview, June 3, 2016)

Although Terrence has a science department chair that serves as an intermediary between him and Assistant Principal Baxter, Terrence is confident that his chair's involvement would not yield a better outcome:

He is really great but he has no power. The department chair has no power. They have no power. He realizes that he doesn't have power but he and I are really cool. We even hang out, but no power. We are good but there's not much that could happen but for me to endure it. (Terrence, Supports Interview, June 3, 2016)

Terrence believes that the class was originally offered to the other teacher because of the perceived animosity Assistant Principal Baxter had against him. When the offer to the other teacher was rescinded, Terrence received his class back but it was changed from a higher-level elective class for honors students to a lower-level elective open to all students. His fear is that the enrollment for the changed course will be targeted for students of color with behavioral, attendance, and performance issues as he experienced earlier in his career at Potomac.

The targeting of teachers because of issues of respect and friendliness frames Terrence's perception of the impact of politics on his teaching career. His most recent experience with the potential reassignment of his class soured Terrence's experience at Frederick Douglass and his desire to remain a classroom teacher after the present school year:

I thought I was going to be in there for a minute but after what I went through this year with the politics of it, I just don't see myself ... I don't want any teacher to go through that. I know if I was at a different school, it would be a



different experience, but with the politics, it is a barrier because if such-and-such doesn't like you, they have the ability to change your classes. They can give you all terrible students. It's just the politics of it. A teacher could be penalized by not being part of the good boy network. (Terrence, Barriers interview, June 16, 2016)

Membership in the “good boy network,” defined by Terrence as teachers who have earned favor with administrators, has its privileges. Terrence found that the political dynamics gave favored teachers access to prime course assignments and fewer troublemaker students enrolled in their courses. The concept of “easy” teachers was another area of focus in Terrence’s collage.

**“Easy” teachers:** Terrence uses the photo of the Staples “easy” button to depict the concept of “easy” teachers that he has encountered over the course of his teaching career. “Easy” teachers are teachers who were well-known for providing less-than-challenging content – if they were providing content at all – to their students. Terrence found that “easy” teachers were often given this latitude from administrators without any form of accountability because they were a part of the “good boy network”. Terrence recounts his experience picking up a course that was previously assigned to an “easy” teacher:

My second year at Frederick Douglass, I taught earth science and biology. The year before me, the earth science teacher was not certified in science. He was certified in [physical education] but, because he was part of the ‘good boy network,’ they gave it to him. They knew damn well what was happening in that man’s class. They were watching videos -- not earth science videos but

movies like 'Boyz n The Hood,' 'Baby Boy,' and 'Belly.' All they would do is worksheets and work quotes all day long. He wasn't the earth science teacher anymore but those kids coming in were thinking, 'This is what it's going to be.' That made it extremely difficult for me. (Terrence, Barriers Interview, June 16, 2016)

Terrence received pushback from students and parents who expected to have an easier time in his earth science class. Terrence felt that he had to give students a challenging experience because he was an African-American teacher. He holds his students to a higher standard with respect to their work, their behavior, and their overall participation within the course. He felt that being an 'easy' teacher may give him high regard among students but would tarnish his reputation as a new teacher of color. However, Terrence does acknowledge that teacher race may play a role in who is given the latitude to be an "easy" teacher:

The AP Environmental Science teacher who was white, would give out As and their final project was coloring. I'm not kidding. If you look at the AP Environmental Science test scores, they are low. None of the students passed their exam. They were getting ones and twos [out of a maximum score of five] but they have all these As. There's a disconnect and her classes were always packed. Students wanted to transfer from Marine Science to Environmental Science because it was an easier course. (Terrence, Barriers Interview, June 16, 2016)

Terrence also expresses concern over the lack of discipline exerted by "easy" teachers. He often hears about the differences between his classroom management

style and the classroom management style of “easy” teachers from students and their parents:

It also makes my job difficult that when you have those easy teachers and who don't have good classroom discipline. ‘I could do this in such-and-such class. Why can't I do it in here?’ Because I'm not such-and-such. Then parents will be like, ‘Well, you're the only one.’ Well, everybody should be doing it. I have the rule book and I'm following the rule but it's hard when I'm the only teacher following the rules. (Terrence, Barriers Interview, June 16, 2016)

Terrence credits his work as an instructor for an online university for his work ethic and comfort in his teaching role. While he appreciates his teacher certification program for the training he received, he brings additional experience from his non-traditional higher education work. He finds that this supplemental training has served him well in the classroom but observes that other teachers do not receive adequate training for the rigors of public school teaching.

**Inadequate training:** The final barrier highlighted in Terrence’s collage is the apparent discrepancies in teacher training. Classroom teachers complete their training at different institutions in varying program formats – graduate versus undergraduate, full-time versus part-time, and traditional versus alternative to name a few. Although Terrence completed an alternative certification program, he feels that his supplemental experience as a college professor has proven more valuable in the high school classroom. When asked whether his teacher preparation program adequately prepared him for the classroom, Terrence expressed that he felt more than prepared to teach high school students:

Coming from Knight University, I already had great training from that; I didn't require a lot more. How do I write a test? How do I design a great lesson plan? These are things that, even though you may assume that the teacher knows, you need to have checkpoints in place to make sure that they know it. (Terrence, Supports Interview, June 3, 2016)

Despite his confidence in his abilities to teach his high school students, Terrence voiced concern over teachers implementing new instructional strategies without adequate training to ensure proper implementation:

We are not trained. We're not. We got the theory in school but we didn't get the actual practice of how to do it. Then, you have to realize not everybody went to the same school. We also have people come in from DC Fellows and Teach for America, so training is uneven. How do we do that [skill]? How do we check for understanding? (Terrence, Barriers Interview, June 16, 2016)

As an example, the science department at Frederick Douglass recently implemented a co-teaching model, which has been a source of frustration for Terrence. He was assigned a co-teacher for a marine science class that he designed himself. He was paired with a 22-year-old White male teacher who just completed his teacher certification months earlier. At first, Terrence embraced the opportunity to work with the new teacher but was soon met with challenges:

When I first met him, I was trying to give him advice on how to work the system and everything. He's like, 'Oh, I got this. I taught in Southeast over the summer.' I said, 'What grade?' 'Elementary.' I'm like, "Well, this is high school. Okay?' 'I scored really high on all of my markings, so I don't think I

have a problem.’ Well, I guess I let the Black side of me get angry, like, ‘Oh, here comes another entitled White guy. Okay, fine. You know what? If you've got all of this, just go for it and you're on your own.’ We're great friends now but it was a lot of friction, a lot of tension because neither him nor I knew about co-teaching. Our assistant principal just gave us a pamphlet and said, ‘Here you go.’ (Terrence, Support Interview, June 3, 2016)

Overall, Terrence feels that administrators should do more to prepare teachers when implementing new instructional strategies and initiatives, which would set up teachers and students for the success that they expect for their school.

#### *Terrence’s “Supports” Collage*

Terrence’s supports collage includes five photographs – a mix of personal photos and Google images – that depict factors that motivated him during his first year of teaching (Figure 10). Terrence’s photographs represent three major supports during his teaching journey: theatrical representations of effective educators, the students with whom he interacts daily, and the mentorship he received from various role models in his personal and professional lives that have influenced his teaching philosophy and norms.

***The Marva Collins Story and Lean on Me:*** The photo in the bottom right-hand corner of Terrence’s collage is a freeze-frame capture from the 1981 film, “The Marva Collins Story,” starring Cicely Tyson and Morgan Freeman. The movie is based on the true story of Chicago teacher Marva Collins who, after growing frustrated as a teacher within the public school system, opened her own preparatory school for inner-city students. Marva’s students would have been labeled as special



**Figure 10. Terrence’s “Supports” Collage**

education students today but, despite her students’ difficulties in the classroom, her students demonstrated significant gains in standardized test scores after one year. Terrence found some similarities between Marva’s experience within the Chicago public school system and his own experience in Washington, DC:

Her students were exceptional not because they came in exceptional, but because she taught them really hard. She was like, ‘If I could do this for my

students every single year, I want to start a school on my own.’ You could see within that first year she really struggled. She was becoming even more disillusioned with the public school system because of all the red tape, the bureaucracy and everything. It's more about the red tape and bureaucracy than it is about the kids, about the actual job, which I do feel now. (Terrence, Supports Interview, June 3, 2016)

Terrence also referenced the 1989 film “Lean on Me,” starring Morgan Freeman and Robert Guillaume, during his supports interview. The film is based on the true story of Joe Clark, a former teacher at Eastside High School -- a low-performing high school in Paterson, New Jersey – who was appointed to serve as its principal during a time of rampant drug use and crime. Joe Clark employed a no-nonsense leadership style that eventually earned the respect of students and led to marked improvement in student performance. Terrence admires the work of Joe Clark and his commitment to discipline. The method employed by Joe Clark were “the same method as my mom; the same method of Marva Collins” (Terrence, Supports Interview, June 3, 2016). The examples set by his mother, Marva Collins, and Joe Clark serve as a frame of reference for his own work as an educator today.

**Mentorship from teacher role models:** Terrence values the mentorship he has received from the teachers and administrators who have served as role models for effective teaching and education leadership. Terrence’s mother has been particularly helpful to him as he embarked on his teaching career. Terrence’s mom is a Reading/Language Arts teacher with nearly three decades of teaching experience in urban schools. Terrence looks to his mom for advice on how to handle difficult

students and colleagues. In his supports collage, Terrence includes a picture of himself in a cap and gown with his mother after his kindergarten promotion. He fondly remembers how his mother would read the *Sweet Pickles* books to him every night as a child and tell stories to him about her classroom experiences as an early-career educator:

I listen to her stories as a teacher because she doesn't have a lot of classroom management problems. So even though I've never observed her, I listened to her stories and I knew how to handle students. I wasn't afraid because -- I guess through osmosis or diffuser -- I learned from her. (Terrence, Supports Interview, June 3, 2016)

Terrence also credits Sarah Payne, his assistant principal and mentor at Potomac High School, for her mentorship and guidance during his early teaching career. Although his fear of her transferring schools while under her mentorship caused a severe rift between his and his then-principal, Terrence values Ms. Payne's continued mentorship in a new teaching environment. Unlike Terrence's experience at Frederick Douglass where his assistant principal does not provide adequate support and feedback on his work, Ms. Payne was a constant presence in his classroom and willing to coach Terrence in effective classroom management and teaching methods:

Ms. Payne, she was my assistant principal. By the grace of God, she took me under her wing. When I say she was cruel, disciplining ruthless, just like my [personal] trainer, yes she was. She took me under her wing and she would be in my classroom at least once a week. I never felt threatened. I always felt like



she's here to make me better, you know? (Terrence, Supports Interview, June 3, 2016)

Terrence was also fortunate to participate in a mentorship program for new teachers mandated by his school district. As a participant in the district's mentorship program, Terrence participated in cohort-based courses taught by master educators and designed to support new teacher development. Terrence credits his participation in the district's mentorship program and Ms. Payne's coaching for his growth as a teacher during his first year at Potomac High School.

Unfortunately, Terrence feels that his growth as an educator has stagnated since he transferred to Frederick Douglass two years ago. Ms. Payne made time to provide Terrence with the feedback he needed to improve his practice at Potomac while his current assistant principal, Ms. Baxter, seems uninterested. He links the lack of constructive feedback on the inadequate training received by administrators on how to effectively coach staff:

You don't come to Frederick Douglass to make it. You come there if you already made it because you're going to be on your own, literally on your own. Not because they don't want to leave you on your own, but they don't know how to coach, guide and train you, you know? Ms. Payne came to my classroom and she would take my test and give me feedback on it. My current AP doesn't. 'Oh, I don't have the time.' Okay, but you do have a job to do, lady. (Terrence, Supports Interview, June 3, 2016)

Terrence feels that effective mentorship during the early years of teaching serves as a major support to new urban teachers. He strives to give the same support he received

from his mentors to the students enrolled in his courses. Terrence highlights his students and his efforts to showcase student work as another motivator toward career persistence.

**His students:** As Ms. Payne goes above and beyond for Terrence as a mentor, Terrence is equally as committed to providing quality opportunities for his students to develop and grow in biology. Terrence's face lights up whenever he talks about his students and their successes. His supports collage features a picture of four of his former students at Potomac High School, which represents his strong commitment to his students regardless of their circumstances. Of the students in the picture – Jayson, the young man in the jumpsuit in the middle of the photo – missed many days of school because he was in adjudication. When he came back to school full-time, he was the pillar of the science group pictured in Terrence's collage. Terrence was truly impressed by Jason's interest in environmental science and the example he set for his peers despite his legal troubles:

He'll be doing research on water pollution, be like, 'Can you believe these people are getting away with this?' I'm like, 'Well, is that good or bad?' 'That's bad. The government is not fining them.' He got so into it. When it came time to decorate [the pollution display], they were looking to him. He was like, 'Look, I'm a dude. I know nothing about colors and everything else, this up to you all.' (Terrence, Supports Interview, June 3, 2016)

Terrence coordinated a science fair to showcase his students' work. Teachers, master educators, and professors from local universities, as well as school-, district-, and state-level administrators, were invited to view student displays and serve as judges.

Jayson's group prepared a display on environmental pollution and stood with their poster to answer questions posed by visitors and judges.

Every one of them said how impressed they were with Jayson. They were so impressed with him. That's what keeps me going is him. He was in adjudication. He was in litigation. He was on house arrest. He was in a halfway home and look at what he did. (Terrence, Supports Interview, June 3, 2016)

Terrence continues to provide opportunities for students to demonstrate their understanding of scientific concepts. This past spring, Terrence organized a STEM demonstration day that included shark dissections performed by students. Terrence shared a video of highlights from the event – including photos from the shark dissections, student reflections on future careers in STEM, and interviews from invited teachers and guests reiterating the need for more hands-on opportunities in STEM for urban students. He is very proud of his students and their accomplishments, which serve as a motivator for him to continue his work in urban schools.

#### *Next Steps for Terrence*

Despite the many successes he has had with former and current students, Terrence stated during both interviews that he plans to leave teaching after the 2016-2017 school year, which would be his fifth year in the classroom. As part of his teacher certification program, he is required to teach in urban schools for five academic years or he would need to repay the cost of tuition, books, and stipend he received as part of the program. Two of the barriers cited during Terrence's barriers

interview -- school politics and inadequate support from administrators – have influenced his decision to leave the classroom.

Terrence plans to continue in the education sector as a school administrator or as an entrepreneur providing resources & support services to urban schools. In his spare time, Terrence creates instructional resources to simplify the instructional planning process for teachers and instructional coaches. He has already started the process of creating an LLC to protect his intellectual property, recognizing the need to protect his work as his own:

It is beyond amazing. I don't want it to be used by everybody because it's mine, so I have my own LLC. I slap that on it and it can't be used. I guess from a Black male perspective there are these extra lengths to protect ourselves.... Because once they get ahold of this, they're going to send it out to everybody and then I get nothing. No money, nothing. They could easily put their name on it and say, 'Here is my [work]'. No. As a Black male, I must protect my self-worth and value. (Terrence, Supports Interview)

Terrence is not afraid of his next adventure. He acknowledges that it is time for him to start making “boss moves,” as his students say (Terrence, Barriers Interview, June 16, 2016). He understands that leaving the classroom next year is a huge financial risk but Terrence has faith in himself and his worth:

I'm going to cry my damn desk and if things don't work out but, believe me, I will keep continue to keep trying. I'm going to continue to keep trying.

(Terrence, Barriers Interview, June 16, 2016)

### Summary

The four African-American teachers who participated in this study observed varying levels of success and challenge during their early years of teaching; despite these differences, each teacher found their motivation to persist through different means. Evelyn, a traditionally-trained elementary school teacher in New York City, is highly motivated by serving African-American students and helping them find their gifts. Tracy, a long-time teacher aide turned full-time teacher in St. Louis, continues teaching because her students are incredibly resilient despite the challenges they face outside of the classroom. Sandra, born and raised in the same area where she teaches middle-grades Math in Dallas, leans on her family to provide the support she needs to continue her work with a highly-transient student population. Terrence, a forward-thinking high school science teacher in Washington, DC, creates additional opportunities outside of school time to push his students towards greatness.

Although each teacher's experience was framed by the contexts in which they lived, learned, and worked, some commonalities were found in the types of barriers and challenges experience as well as the strategies that were employed to mitigate challenges. The following chapter will delve into these similarities across cases in more detail.

## Chapter 5: Cross-Case Analysis of Themes

The four case studies highlighted in Chapter 4 provide an overview of each teacher's personal characteristics, background experiences, and contextual influences proximal to their teaching experiences in urban settings. The present chapter will critically examine and synthesize data from the photo collages and participant interviews to answer the primary research question: *How do personal, background, and contextual factors influence teaching career persistence for a group of novice African-American teachers in urban school settings?* Using social cognitive career theory (SCCT; Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1994, 2000, 2002) as the theoretical lens for this work, I will address the primary research question through an examination of each of the supporting questions:

- How do the pre-college, pre-service, and in-service experiences of novice African-American teachers influence their teaching career persistence?
- Which personal, background, and contextual factors are most impactful to African-American teachers' choice to persist during their early years of teaching in urban school settings?
- How do novice African-American teachers mitigate apparent and perceived challenges to career persistence?

The chapter will conclude with a summary of findings based on a review of all participant interview and collage data.

### *Novice African-American Teacher Persistence*

The decision to persist is highly personalized and contingent upon a multitude of factors specific to a teacher's individual experience. The four study participants observed varying levels of success and challenge during their early years of teaching; despite these differences, each teacher found their motivation to persist through different means. However, a few commonalities were discovered between the participants, which are highlighted below.

#### *Pre-College Experiences*

The pre-college experiences of the four participants were found to be less impactful than their pre-service and in-service experiences. While pre-college experiences led the participants to enter the teaching profession, experiences prior to entry into teacher certification programs were not mentioned as influences on their current teaching persistence. For example, Evelyn shared that she had positive K-12 experiences as a student and found teaching to be a good career fit; however, it was her relationships with members of her professional support network that keep her motivated to teach. Sandra remembered her sixth-grade teacher's frustration while teaching her peers about integers – which paralleled her own experience teaching her students – but her recollection of the experience did not extend into how he mitigated the challenge. Overall, the proximity of experiences to the teaching experience dictated the level of consideration during a teacher's reflection on career persistence; in-service experiences were found to be most impactful to persistence decisions, followed by pre-service experiences and pre-college experiences, respectively.

### *Pre-Service Experiences*

Differences in persistence to teaching were observed between the traditionally-certified teachers and the alternatively-certified teachers. The study was designed to solicit participants who received their teacher preparation through different means. Both Evelyn and Tracy completed their teacher preparations through traditional certification (TC) programs; Sandra and Terrence earned their credentials through alternative certification (AC) programs. Evelyn and Tracy see themselves continuing in the classroom for the immediate future while Sandra and Terrence both contemplate transition into different roles within the next couple of years. This finding is consistent with Quartz et al's (2008) assertion that teachers who receive their teacher training through AC programs are more likely to leave the profession than teachers trained through TC programs.

There also appears to be a connection between the amount of time attributed to the student teaching experience and teacher commitment to the field. Evelyn's student teaching practicum lasted one full year while Tracy completed her practicum while employed full-time as a teaching aide. In contrast, Sandra completed her practicum during a two-month summer school experience and Terrence was the teacher of record soon after the start of his teacher training. Previous research on novice teacher attrition supports this finding (Boyd et al, 2005; Olsen & Anderson, 2007; Quartz et al, 2008).

### *In-Service Experiences*

The teachers who participated in the current study demonstrated that their in-service experiences were most impactful on their choice to persist in the teaching



field. These choices were often predicated by the enforcement of district & school mandates or interactions with administrators & colleagues. All participating teachers reference negative experiences with administrators and colleagues that caused them to question their commitment to their chosen career path. Evelyn becomes frustrated with teachers in her school who are not committed to her mission of helping African-American students determine their gifts. Tracy is frustrated with her principal's assertion that Kindergarten students need to spend hours on the computer every day instead of developing the social and behavioral skills necessary for promotion to the first grade. Sandra resents the use of standardized test scores in decisions regarding teacher effectiveness and staff planning. Terrence is so frustrated with the inability of his school's leadership team to support his development that he plans to leave the classroom after fulfilling his obligation to his teacher certification program.

The literature on novice teacher retention stresses the importance of mentoring and induction during the early years of teaching (Huisman, Singer, & Catapano, 2010; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; LeMaistre & Paré, 2010). Interestingly, only Evelyn and Terrence participated in a formal mentoring program at the onset of their teaching careers. Both teachers cited how the mentoring they received shaped their practice over the years. Tracy and Sandra did not have a formal mentoring and induction program during their early years yet they found mentorship in other ways. While Tracy did not participate in a formal mentoring program, her work as a teacher's aide while completing her certification program provided a supportive environment and adequate examples of effective instruction to inform her own practice. Sandra's wife, who is also a novice educator, serves as a

peer mentor and confidante. However, the treatment received by administrators and colleagues can overshadow the encouragement and support received from key mentors.

Teachers rely on their support networks – including role models, mentors, fellow educators, and their families – to mitigate the challenges experienced in the field. Three of our four participants have teachers in their immediate families (Tracy, Sandra, and Terrence); Evelyn utilizes the connections she has made through participation in professional development activities as a source of support. The sections that follow will provide more insight into the specific supports, barriers, and strategies to mitigate challenges encountered by novice African-American teachers in urban schools. A summary of the barriers, supports and strategies employed to mitigate challenges are included in Table 2.

### *Barriers and Challenges to Teacher Persistence*

After review of the interview and collage data collected as part of the present study, three prominent themes emerged as barriers to teaching career persistence: school culture, out-of-school influences, and difficulty with administrators and colleagues.

#### **School culture**

Each teacher mentioned issues with the school environment that impacted their ability to be an effective teacher for their students. Challenges related to school culture manifested in different ways for each participating teacher. Sandra felt

**Table 2: Summary of Participant Barriers, Supports, and Strategies to Mitigate Challenges**

	<i>Barriers</i>	<i>Supports</i>	<i>Strategies to Mitigate Challenges</i>
Evelyn (New York, NY / 3 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loneliness</li> <li>• Code-switching</li> <li>• The “Savior” Complex</li> <li>• Salary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive K-12 learning experiences</li> <li>• Teaching philosophy</li> <li>• Professional support networks</li> <li>• Commitment to social justice</li> <li>• Mastery</li> <li>• Respect from her students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-care</li> <li>• Leaning on her support network</li> </ul>
Tracy (St. Louis, MO / 5 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stress and burnout</li> <li>• Out-of-school experiences</li> <li>• Increased accountability</li> <li>• Difficulties with administrators</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher role models</li> <li>• Commitment to student success</li> <li>• Respect from parents and students</li> <li>• School culture and diversity</li> <li>• Student resilience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leave work at work</li> <li>• Not taking shortcomings at work personally</li> </ul>
Sandra (Dallas, TX / 5 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High teacher turnover</li> <li>• Transient student populations</li> <li>• The poverty cycle</li> <li>• Standardized high-stakes tests</li> <li>• Student apathy for learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family</li> <li>• Colleagues</li> <li>• High-quality professional development</li> <li>• Implementation of curriculum</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-care</li> <li>• Relating to students through content and experience</li> <li>• Leaning on her support network</li> </ul>
Terrence (Washington, DC / 4 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The dynamics of diversity between students and staff</li> <li>• School politics</li> <li>• “Easy” teachers</li> <li>• Inadequate training for teachers and administrators</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Movie portrayals of successful urban teachers</li> <li>• Mentorship from teacher role models</li> <li>• Students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Code-switching</li> <li>• Honesty / meeting students where they are</li> <li>• Extracurricular work with his students</li> </ul>

that the transient student population impacted classroom routines and student expectations:

There's different influxes that come in and out, so that makes it hard to form relationships with the kids because they're moving a lot. Hard to get your classroom rhythm and expectations because you'll have to start it over.... You have to re-go over those procedures when new kids come in, and it can mess up the funk with the kids behavior, and stuff like that. That makes it tricky. (Sandra, Barriers Interview, June 16, 2016)

Sandra also noted issues related to high teacher turnover and low teacher quality at her school site:

Teachers are really hard to fire. It gets frustrating when you personally work with that person, I think. I had a teammate who was just awful, and she is still there. She teaches third grade now, and she's still there. I'm just like, 'I don't understand how you are still here.' Our sixth grade math teacher, she's still there. They moved her. They keep moving them. I feel like education's the only place where if you don't do your job, somebody else does your job for you. (Sandra, Barriers Interview, June 16, 2016)

Tracy's school culture centered around accountability and the use of standardized curricula to improve student outcomes. Tracy felt that her experience as a teacher and knowledge of her students' needs were suppressed in favor of what she felt were questionable methods:

To me, it felt more like indoctrination as opposed to education. A lot of sameness. Things just became very robotic. All those things you hear about charter schools. That's just what it felt like.... I was like, I'm a Stepford teacher. This is not me. I had no ownership of it. I just was like, you could

take a monkey that could talk and give them a script. What did I go to school for to learn all this stuff? (Tracy, Supports Interview, March 30, 2016)

The culture at Terrence's school was highly political; teachers who earned favor with administrators were seemingly exempt from curricular rigor or meeting high instructional standards.

A teacher could be penalized for not being part of the 'good boy network.' Before I came to Frederick Douglass, there was an investigation because of one of the [assistant principals]. If you were cool with her, she would just give you an evaluation and never show up to your class. It's those types of politics that make it to where you just don't want to be part of the system. (Terrence, Barriers Interview, June 16, 2016)

Students and parents were aware of the cultural dynamics at play. Terrence was confronted by parents and students when he didn't conform to their expectations:

'I could do this in such-and-such class, why can't I do it in here?' Because I'm not such-and-such. Then parents will be like, "Well, you're the only one." Well, everybody should be doing it. I have the rule book and I'm following the rules, but it's hard when I'm the only teacher following the rules. (Terrence, Barriers Interview, June 16, 2016)

The culture at Evelyn's most recent school was more authoritarian than democratic. Students were expected to adhere to strict behavioral norms such as sitting with their hands folded at all times and waiting until called upon to enter into a group discussion. Evelyn felt that she was a glorified disciplinarian complicit in keeping students from being their authentic selves:

The more I thought about the things I was asking the kids to do, like, ‘Sit up straight, stop talking, stop doing this, stop dancing, stop tapping your pencil.’ I was like, ‘I’m an oppressor. Y’all have turned me into an oppressor, and I can’t do it.’ (Evelyn, Barriers Interview, April 27, 2016)

Evelyn’s resistance to these school norms forged a sense of loneliness in her. She doubted her ability to work in an environment that suppressed student expression and individuality, particularly in students of color.

There are students in Queens, which has a high immigrant population, Asian immigrants, same level of Title I needing funding. There’s schools where there are equal amounts of students who are poor, and we don’t treat them like this, so it can’t be about money. It can’t be the urban environment, because the kids who live on the Upper West Side, whose parents are investment bankers, we don’t treat them like this. They live in an urban environment. The only thing I could think of is the common denominator... I guess the common denominator for why we treated these kids like this and these kids like that was race. As a Black teacher, you’re asking me to oppress my people. I can’t do that. (Evelyn, Barriers Interview, April 27, 2016)

### **Out-of-school influences**

The lived experiences of students greatly impacted participants’ choice to persist in the field. As the primary work environment, the classroom serves as a microcosm of struggles experienced in the greater community – including issues such as poverty, crime, homelessness, and health care. Teachers are often tasked to

address these issues while instilling foundational social, behavioral, and academic skills in a climate of increased accountability for staff and students. The need to balance meeting student needs with the needs of school administrators creates a stressful environment that can be difficult to overcome – even with support. Tracy directly addressed the poverty cycle and some of the issues her students face outside of school and how it impacts her ability to teach:

There are things that come along with being in poverty, like the homelessness, like the being constantly hungry, the instability of your household. Many of those things that affect when you come to school and their performance that it's not addressed, but that has a big impact.... There are a lot of dynamics in my class and it's just one of me. I'm expected to keep all of those dynamics engaged all at once. It's impossible. (Tracy, Barriers Interview, March 2, 2016)

Sandra talked about her day-to-day struggle of providing homework assignments for students who may not have access to a computer at home or basic school supplies for in-class work:

I think the kids have a lack of their own materials; it can be an issue. You don't have paper. I have kids who do their homework in pen. 'Ms. Sandra, this is the only thing I could find to write with.' Just basic pencil, paper, spiral that can be an issue. 'My lights got turned off. I wasn't able to do my homework.' That can be an issue. (Sandra, Barriers Interview, June 16, 2016)

Evelyn and Terrence examined macro-level issues that impact student focus and performance. Evelyn was highly aware of society's perception of people of color and the role of education in destroying stereotypes and misconceptions:

I'm aware of the fact that kids are kids, and they're not coming out of the womb thinking about the fact that there's a high number of black men incarcerated. They're not coming out of the womb thinking about the fact that if they grew up speaking Spanish, people are going to discriminate against them. They don't know that stuff. That's when it started to get hard.... I guess in my head the students were more aware of their circumstances. I thought that they would know that society is betting against you, and you've got to put in the work starting from Day One in order to be successful. (Evelyn, Barriers Interview, April 27, 2016)

Terrence understood how outside events that impacted the African-American community could impact the students in his classes and he wanted to address these issues head-on as one of the few African-American male teachers at his school. When students returned for school in Fall 2015, Black America was reeling from the recent deaths of Trayvon Martin and Mike Brown. Terrence consulted with his administrators and instructional coaches on how to broach these subjects with his high school Biology students. He was instructed to stick to his content and leave the discussions on police brutality to student government, which was led by an Asian-American female student. Terrence heeded his administration's advice but continued to integrate reading exercises about issues affecting the African-American community



into his biology course. Despite the apparent need for the readings based on his student demographics, not all of Terrence's students appreciated his efforts:

I brought in a Floyd Mayweather article about how he can't read and also about how African-Americans are strongly illiterate and the whole class read it. The white students went back and complained, 'He's teaching us something that's not part of marine science or science.' The administration was like, 'Well, just stick to your topic.' I'm like, 'This is everybody's problem.'  
(Terrence, Supports Interview, June 3, 2016)

### **Difficulties with administrators & colleagues**

All four teachers cited difficulties with administrators and colleagues as primary barriers to their persistence. School districts' increased reliance on individualized metrics such as standardized test scores, attendance, and other accountability measures deemphasizes the role of teachers in developing critical thinking and complex problem-solving skills needed in today's highly-collaborative, technology-driven work environment.

All four teachers mentioned issues with the feedback they received from their administrators. Sandra has felt the pressure of district demands on her principal passed down to her and her colleagues in staff meetings and one-on-one feedback discussions. Sandra's school district sets projected passing rates for the STAAR tests every year. The projected passing rate for Sandra's students hovers around the 40-percent mark, which upset her because she expects so much more from her students. However, Sandra has been fortunate to surpass the district's expectations this past

school year with 80 percent of her students passing the test. Despite her student's performance, her principal wanted an even higher pass rate and inquired about why her special education students did not meet the passing benchmark:

It frustrated me. [The school district and my principal] made me mad. So upset that I wanted to cry. I was just angry, and balling my fists that we would base everything off these test scores and what you're projecting me to be like. Then when I blow it out the water you still want more, or it still wasn't good enough. It can be very frustrating when you feel like everything is numbers driven. (Sandra, Barriers Interview, June 16, 2016)

Evelyn found her teaching evaluations to be confusing and unhelpful in her development as a new teacher:

When we get feedback, it's always, 'Here's one plus, and here's one minus.' I just wonder, will I ever reach a point where they'll just give me a plus? I'm always getting a plus and a minus. That makes me feel like I'm at 50 percent. It's like, when I do good, come tell me I did good. When I do bad, come tell me I do bad. But don't tell me I'm always doing good and bad. That's confusing for me. My feedback this year has been a little less helpful, and I feel like it's kind of lowered my teaching self-esteem, my professional self-esteem. (Evelyn, Supports Interview, May 23, 2016)

Tracy has reached out to her principal for advice on how to handle difficult students. Tracy's principal, a new administrator with limited teaching experience, was unable to provide the guidance she needed to control her classroom:

When you have an administrator say they don't know what to do, you know, because when I went to her and said, 'Do you have any suggestions on dealing with it?' She was like, 'They need medication.' I'm like, if the administrator doesn't know what to do, what makes you think that I know what to do? To a certain degree, it feels like my first year of teaching all over again. (Tracy, Barriers Interview, March 2, 2016)

Terrence's experience with his Assistant Principal Baxter at Frederick Douglass High School has been tumultuous since he started working there, as highlighted in Chapter Four. In reflecting on his administrator's effectiveness, Terrence highlighted a primary issue observed in new administrators such as Ms. Baxter at Frederick Douglass:

The research shows that people do not leave their job; they leave their boss. You have people in these roles who sometimes are managing people for the first time. They haven't managed anything else. All they know is education and they haven't had a good trainer themselves on how to manage people. (Terrence, Barriers Interview, June 16, 2016)

Terrence's situation is different from the other participants in that he had a mentor during his previous position at Potomac High School who continued to work with him after he transferred schools. His mentor counteracted the negative feedback he received from his current assistant principal and served as a support even though they worked at different schools. The following section reviews the primary themes associated with supports and motivators of novice African-American teacher persistence in urban schools.

### Supports and Motivators of Teacher Persistence

Four prominent themes emerged as supports and motivators to teaching career persistence: teaching philosophy; parent & family encouragement and support; professional mentors & support networks; and respect from parents and students.

#### **Teaching philosophy**

Teachers referenced the desire to work with students of color as a determining factor for where they started their careers. Participating teachers view education as a means of social justice, an opportunity for African-American students to improve their circumstances and, by extension, strengthen the African-American community. The struggles of the African-American community with respect to poverty, crime, drugs, and other influences on socioeconomic status motivate these teachers to work with urban students. A strong commitment to serving African-American students continues to motivate the participating teachers despite the challenges they face.

Three out of four participating teachers have teaching philosophies rooted in social justice. Evelyn cultivated her teaching philosophy during her undergraduate teacher preparation program. Using Shel Silverstein's *The Giving Tree* as an allegory for education, Evelyn explained her personal beliefs about the role of education for students of color:

I feel like education is the only institution that will actually give you the opportunity to change your world and change your fate. People want to talk about money like money can change your life, but education is what's going to change your life. Just knowing how to get money, or what it is about money,

power, respect, you have to know stuff in order to get those things.... You can always come back to your education. It's never going to stop giving to you. No matter what stage you are in life, no matter whether you're alone, you're making a transition, or things are going great. Your education will be there, and it's the thing that's going to propel you forward into whatever direction you choose to go. (Evelyn, Supports Interview, May 23, 2016)

Even when Evelyn decided to go to business school after completing her undergraduate teacher certification program, she continued to feel a pull towards the teaching profession. After her first week, she missed the classroom and wanted to return. She finished her graduate program but found a teaching job shortly thereafter. Her teaching philosophy – a willingness to help students of color find their gifts – is what she credited for her return to the classroom:

The thing that really lead me to teaching was feeling really fortunate for what I'd been given through random circumstance, what seems random to me, maybe divine circumstances. Seeing that there really is an issue with the way we're teaching people, with what we're teaching, and wanting to do something to help with that issue is what keeps me there and what got me there. (Evelyn, Intro Interview, February 5, 2016)

Sandra viewed her move to the education sector as a calling. She participated in tutoring and mentoring programs in high school and college but abandoned the field to pursue criminal justice in college. She was later drawn into the education field after having difficulty obtaining a job in law enforcement. Although she didn't plan on becoming a teacher, she embraced her work with students of color in Dallas.

When asked if she would feel comfortable working in a suburban district, Sandra expressed a deeper commitment to the students she served in Dallas:

I want to be in a population like this. I feel like I'm doing more good even though that population may have more kids who actually pass or may see them graduate, but if I see one of my kids graduate I know it was a true accomplishment. It wasn't, you know, because somebody in their family or somebody on the street probably didn't think they were going to make it at one point. It's a real accomplishment when they graduate. Something should be said about that. (Sandra, Supports Interview, May 19, 2016)

Terrence also views teaching as his calling, something he was “born to do” (Terrence, Supports Interview, June 3, 2016). Also a career-changer, Terrence feels a strong commitment to students of color, particularly young Black men:

When I was in grad school, I read a Time magazine article that said 50 percent of Black males will not graduate high school.... That influenced me to stay because when you come to my class your ass is going to work. Do not think that it's going to be just an easy dump. No, you are going to work.... I want you to get exposed to some of these things that I didn't get exposed to. That is what influences me -- unit recovery, credit recovery, increasing graduation rate -- but we're pushing these kids out and they're not prepared. Our Black students are not prepared. (Terrence, Supports Interview, June 3, 2016)

Of note, all participating teachers attended historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs): three at the undergraduate level, one at the graduate level. HBCUs have a long-standing legacy of social justice for members of the African-American

community. The role of their education at an HBCU on their teaching philosophy is worth further investigation in a future study.

### **Parent & family encouragement and support**

All four participants cited family and community encouragement as a primary support to their career persistence. Three of the four participants have immediate family members who are or were educators; the fourth participant's mother wanted to pursue a teaching career but chose an alternative career path due to financial concerns. All four participants confide in their family members when experiencing dilemmas related to their teaching. For example, Evelyn reached out to her mother and brother when deliberating on transferring to an urban Catholic high school for the 2016-2017 academic year:

I spoke to my family about it. My brother, when he first heard about it, he was like, 'An all-White Catholic girls school that costs as much as college? This is not the mission.' I was like, 'I know.' My mom, on the other hand, was like, 'You never know what you can learn in other environments.' My mom also wants me to stop being so prejudiced. She feels like if I inundate myself with people of other cultures maybe I'll stop being so pro-black. I don't think she's right, but that's her stance. (Evelyn, Supports Interview, May 23, 2016)

Terrence consults with his mom, a reading teacher with over 30 years of experience, because he trusts her judgment and views her as an exemplar of classroom management in schools:

I listen to her stories as a teacher because she doesn't have a lot of classroom management problems, so even though I've never observed her, I listened to her stories that I knew how to handle students. I wasn't afraid because -- I guess through osmosis or diffuser -- I learned from her. (Terrence, Supports Interview, June 3, 2016)

Sandra reaches out to her wife, a teacher in a neighboring district, for advice and support when she's having a hard time at work:

She just keeps me motivated to work hard.... She always worked hard and tried to do the best by the kids. She set that example when we got together. It's non-negotiable to not do the same, pretty much. She drives me to be better, to be my best. Even when I'm low, she drives me to be my best. (Sandra, Supports Interview, May 19, 2016)

Tracy was raised by a family of teachers. Her mother, who passed away four years ago, served as a support to her during her teacher certification program and her first year of teaching. Tracy's grandmother, who retired from teaching nearly 40 years ago, also served as a support to her during her teacher preparation. For Tracy, both women served as role models on which she informed her own teaching practice; "[t]hat's the type of teacher I'd like to be, to go above and beyond for my students." (Tracy, Supports Interview, March 30, 2016)

### **Professional mentors and support networks**

Participating teachers also confide in other members of the teaching community – either those at their school, former colleagues, or fellow educators met



during professional development opportunities. Evelyn found an incredible support network through her participation in a professional development conference in February 2016:

When I went, it was such a fulfilling experience. I felt really empty going in. I was on the verge of ... Am I coming back? Am I going to keep teaching? Should I go back to school and try to hide out for a couple years? But walking into this conference, seeing all these black women and black girls, and just hearing the ones who were echoing my sentiments, who are in exactly the same place I am right now, and kind of being frustrated and unsure, and then speaking to older women who are like, 'Yeah, we went through that, and we made it, and it's going to be okay.' (Evelyn, Supports Interview, May 23, 2016)

Evelyn continues to network with the women she met at the conference, as well as others with whom she connected online via social media, to continually renew and refresh her spirit to perform the difficult work of teaching in urban schools.

Tracy fostered relationships at the school where she worked as a teacher's aide to learn more about best practices in early childhood classrooms. She also learned a great deal from her principal during her year at Aspire Charter School. Her principal conducted periodic evaluations of her teaching and provided advice on how to keep her students engaged & challenged:

Just that one year at the charter school, I really felt like I grew as an educator in regards to really teaching and my students learning and going. Every time she'd come in and observe, and we'd have our post-observation conference, it

was a push to do more with my students. She pushed me to do more with my students and so that made me push my students.... She kept nudging me and I kept nudging them. I was like, they can do it. They can rise to the occasion. They did. I really felt like I grew in regards to pushing students. (Tracy, Supports Interview, March 30, 2016)

Sandra credits her colleagues at her first school for providing her the support she needed to transition from her alternative certification program to full-time teaching:

My teammates my first year were the best teammates ever. We had data meetings. I'm compartmentalized. One of them taught reading language arts; one of them taught science. We had data meetings over our test scores. They did not let me go to my first data meeting by myself. I'm going to my meeting, they're walking with me. I said, 'Where are y'all going?' They said, 'Oh, we're going with you. We're not going to let you sit there by yourself.' They just kind of had my back and they taught me the ropes of Rosa Parks and what to do on your first day and just those little things. (Sandra, Supports Interview, May 19, 2016)

Terrence also developed a strong mentoring relationship during his first year of teaching at Potomac High School with Assistant Principal Payne:

By the grace of God she took me under her wing. She took me under her wing. When I say she was cruel, disciplining ruthless, just like my trainer, yes she was. She took me under and she would be in my classroom at least once a

week. I never felt threatened. I always felt like she's here to make me better.

(Terrence, Supports Interview, June 3, 2016)

In addition to the mentoring he received from Ms. Payne, Terrence also participated in a new teacher mentoring program sponsored by his school district. He completed additional coursework relevant to urban education with a cohort of new teachers in DC Public Schools led by a Master Educator in the district (Terrence, Supports Interview, June 3, 2016). Given the mentorship he received from Ms. Payne, the group support he received from the new teacher mentoring program, and his mother's advice, Terrence had multiple outlets to pursue if he needed support during his early years of teaching. The novice African-American teachers who participated in the study appreciated the mentorship they received during their early careers.

### **Respect from parents and students**

Words and acts of kindness from students and parents were shown to impact novice African-American teacher career persistence in urban schools. Given the level of stress experienced by new teachers, it was not surprising to hear that positive feedback from students and parents impacted teacher resilience. In Tracy's support collage, she included photos of gifts presented to her by her students. She also recounted an example of how a class parent gave her a short break during the school day to enjoy a cup of hot chocolate and regroup. These small acts resonated with Tracy:

I just really felt appreciated by the students and their parents. It feels good when you're appreciated because it's a hard job. A lot of times, in urban

settings, [the appreciation is] not there. (Tracy, Supports Interview, March 30, 2016)

As a high school science teacher, Terrence experienced much animosity from administrators, fellow teachers, students, and parents. However, there were some instances when students and parents showed their appreciation for his work:

The course advisor couldn't stand me, hated me, but [the parents of White students] came around, like, 'I see why you're giving so much work. I get it now.' One of the white students -- I forgot his name but I would never forget his face -- he was like, 'Mom, because of Mr. Lee, I have a better work ethic. Because I have so much work, he really makes me manage my time.'

(Terrence, Barriers Interview, June 16, 2016)

Terrence keeps in contact with his former students to see how they are doing after graduation and get a better sense of students' perception of the preparation they received for college and career. When asked about experiences that had been impactful to him in his journey as a novice urban teacher, he highlighted the appreciation he received from his former students:

When the students come back and say, 'Thank you for being hard even though this was a marine science class. I'm now a biology major and I use what you taught me in biology. You prepared me.' Each year, I wait a year and I write to all my seniors and I ask them, 'Has Frederick Douglass prepared you?' They say, 'No, but you and a few other teachers did.' (Terrence, Supports Interview, June 3, 2016)

Evelyn expressed her frustration over the need to “code-switch” when working with administrators and colleagues in an attempt to present more professionally in the school setting. However, her ability to connect with students as her authentic self earned her students’ respect:

The thing about the mask is I don't feel like I have to wear it for my students. I think that's why my students' respect for me plays such a big role in my motivation, because I know I have to be one person when I'm-- I feel like I have to be one person when I'm in PD, or when I'm in a feedback meeting with my principal, but I know that I can be myself with my kids. (Evelyn, Supports Interview, May 23, 2016)

Sandra participates in learning activities with her students – even if they are in subjects other than science – to show that all aspects of education are important. She recognizes that her actions have an impact on their perceptions of her as a teacher:

I'm reading one of the books from the book bracket challenge so today I was reading it in class with them. Our schedule got all mixed up and they're like, ‘Ms. Lewis, you're reading it too?’ I'm like, ‘Yep. It's good, right?’ I think they think because I do so much math that I don't really read, but I'm like, ‘I try to read, guys.’ They're really impressed when I actually pull out a book and read with them. (Sandra, Supports Interview, May 19, 2016)

In addition to the various supports participating teachers receive during their early years of teaching, they also employ strategies to mitigate the various challenges they encounter in the school environment. An overview of these strategies is presented below.

### Strategies to Mitigate Challenges to Career Persistence

The teachers who participated in the present study utilize various strategies to mitigate challenges to teaching career persistence. The strategies employed by teachers differed across locations and school contexts. Noted strategies include code-switching, treating students with respect, empowerment through student resilience, and self-care.

#### **Code-switching**

Evelyn denotes the concept of code-switching as a barrier and a strategy for mitigating challenges to career persistence. Code-switching serves as a barrier for her because she feels that she cannot be her authentic self with administrators and colleagues who do not share her vision of social justice and student empowerment. However, as mentioned during her interviews, Evelyn finds that her ability to “code-switch” is valuable when communicating with students. All of the teachers in this study use familiar language and mannerisms with their students to stress the importance of their education, convey commitment to their progress, and relay repercussions for inappropriate behavior. Sandra mentions how using ‘Black mama voice’ can get her students’ attention:

We made a joke about how you have to use your ‘Black mama voice’ sometimes, that we need to have staff development on how to use your ‘Black mama voice’ and how to bring out your inner ‘Black mama voice.’ I feel like that helps. I feel like the kids can sometimes-- There are some kids who are

like, 'Oh, she acts like my mama. I know she not playing.' (Sandra, Supports Interview, May 19, 2016)

Terrence also talks about how being familiar with his students has an impact on building rapport with his students. In the following exchange, Terrence talks about how demonstrating his authentic self in the classroom changes students' perceptions of him:

*Terrence:* Do you remember those old TVs we had in the '80s and '90s?  
The kind you had to slap whenever it would go on the fritz?  
Remember that?

*Interviewer:* Yeah.

*Terrence:* Sometimes the slapping actually worked but we don't know why it's actually doing. I don't know what I'm doing that's working. I'm just being me. I'm being Marva Collins. I'm being Joe Clark. I'm being my mom. I'm being Ms. Payne.

*Interviewer:* Without the slapping.

*Terrence:* Oh, yeah, I do slap sometimes... but the thing I realized is that, because I have a relationship with them, I can do that. I can walk up on them without them feeling threatened. It's like walking up on them like your momma do. 'What did you say?' 'Nothing, nothing.' (Terrence, Supports Interview, June 3, 2016)

### **Treating students with respect**

The four teachers who participated in the study truly value the respect and recognition they receive from students and their parents. Likewise, the teachers treat their students with respect in order to cancel problematic behaviors before they start. In an environment that is typically restrictive to students, Evelyn provides opportunities for students to express themselves as individuals without restriction. As an example, Evelyn highlights former student Brandon as an example of the student image that is embraced by other teachers and administrators; however, Brandon was an outgoing child who garnered the attention of and was idolized by his classmates. While he was not a disruptive child, Brandon was also not the picture-perfect depiction used on the cover of the district's strategic plan. In her barriers interview, Evelyn explains how treating students with respect extends to allowing Brandon and other students like him the ability to be their authentic selves in the classroom:

I want to be able to embrace Brandon for who he is, and I want my school to embrace Brandon for who he is, but they only show you the Brandon that they want you to see.... I feel like we're not allowing our students to be themselves or to be the sides of themselves that they're most proud of. (Evelyn, Barriers Interview, April 27, 2016)

Sandra views treating students with respect as being honest and relatable to her students:

I tell the kids, 'Ms. Lewis is not going to lie to you. I may say something you don't like or may hurt your feelings, but I'm not going to lie to you. There's a reason I tell this. I'll tell you why I'm telling you this and if it hurts your



feelings, we can talk about it, but I'm not going to lie to you.' (Sandra, Supports Interview, May 19, 2016)

Sandra demonstrated how she has used her own experiences as a student in Dallas to foster a sense of sameness and understanding between her and her students:

For a lot of the kids, their parents work at night or they're not home. Well, my dad worked at night and I still had to get my permission slips signed. Little things like that. I'll find little nuances that were the same, but a lot of it, you know... We started off in a house and then we moved to an apartment, so things don't always go your way. Just little things like that. Some of it can mirror; some of it not so much. The one I pull the most is being a struggling reader and still having to make it through. (Sandra, Supports Interview, May 19, 2016)

Terrence and Tracy demonstrate their treatment of students with respect by presenting them with opportunities to stretch their understanding through challenging content. Tracy recounted how she introduced the concept of author's purpose to her kindergarten students with great results:

I mean, how many kindergartners learn about author's purpose? [My principal] kept nudging me and I kept nudging them. I was like, they can do it. They can rise to the occasion. And they did. (Tracy, Supports Interview, March 30, 2016)

Terrence provides extracurricular opportunities to his students so they can demonstrate their understanding of scientific concepts. During the 2015-2016 academic year, Terrence hosted a marine science demonstration day at Frederick

Douglass High School. Students were asked to perform dissections of marine animals and demonstrate their understanding of marine biology concepts. Prior to the end of the school year, Terrence asked his graduating seniors to participate in a video message to incoming freshmen providing advice on how to maximize their high school experiences (Terrence, Supports Interview, June 3, 2016; Terrence, Barriers Interview, June 16, 2016). Terrence understands that the input of former students would be valuable to incoming freshmen and recognizes the value of their feedback. Both the science demonstration day and the graduating seniors video highlight the level of respect Terrence has for his students, their experiences, and the value that they bring to the educational experience.

### **Empowerment through student resilience**

As the novice teachers viewed their former teachers, mentors, and administrators as role models, they also found inspiration from the students they serve. Tracy finds inspiration in her former student Imani, whose close friend Tamyka was killed by a stray bullet while sitting in her bedroom in Summer 2015. Imani's story and the myriad of challenging experiences her students face inspire Tracy to persist in her work:

I think about students where they don't have the best. They're resilient. Even though [Imani] lost her dad. She's lost her best friend. Her mother is not 100 percent in her life. She's in and out. She has her grandmother. At the same time, she still manages to make good grades and just be a good student. She's getting counseling and she's able to express how she feels about things. I just

think there are so many students like that, that in spite what they have going on, they are determined to excel. That's just awesome. (Tracy, Supports Interview, March 30, 2016)

Similarly, Terrence finds inspiration in a former student who was adjudicated yet impressed distinguished guests through his environmental science presentation at an open house:

Every one of them said how impressed they were with him. They were so impressed with him. That's what keeps me going is him. He was in adjudication. He was in litigation. He was on house arrest. He was in a halfway home and look at what he did. (Terrence, Supports Interview, June 3, 2016)

Both Tracy and Terrence noted that their students are able to be successful despite the out-of-school influences that manifest in their classrooms. Student success in light of societal challenges push these novice African-American teachers to work harder for their students.

### **Self-care**

All four teachers utilize self-care to mitigate apparent and perceived challenges in their careers. Evelyn participates in yoga classes outside of work to exercise and reclaim her focus. Terrence plans monthly get-togethers with his closest friends, preparing all of the food himself. Tracy and Sandra, however, find it more difficult to provide their own self-care. Both teachers cited their “workaholic” tendencies, often becoming so overwhelmed with work that they forget to take the

time to take care of themselves. Sandra relies on her wife to make sure she takes some much-needed time with her family:

Melanie has to make me really aware sometimes. She's like, 'You need to come home. The kids want to see you.' She makes me really, really aware, so it's not as bad because I have a good wife who will tell my Black ass to come home. She'll be like, 'I'm tired. You need to come get your kids.' I'll be like, 'Okay. It's my turn with the kids. I got it. I've got to go get the kids.' (Sandra, Barriers Interview, June 16, 2016)

Tracy, on the other hand, chooses to set hard limits on the amount of time she devotes to work during the day.

I don't stay late like I did my first year teaching. I don't get there early, in extra early and stay extra late. I rarely do that. I'm out the door at 3:45. I don't stress in that way. I don't do that anymore, because I know better. (Tracy, Barriers Interview, March 2, 2016)

Tracy prefers to keep her work and her personal life separate. She tries to reset at the end of her work day and leave issues related to work at work:

It's like I have to have a mindset of 'it is what it is.' Do the best that I can, with what I have to work with in my classroom, and not to take it personal. Just okay, you can't take this personal. To an extent, leave it at work. Not to say that you don't care when you go home but it's like, okay, you have to stop carrying the weight of the world on your shoulders alone. (Tracy, Supports Interview, March 30, 2016)

The need to mentally reset at the end of the work day is critical to Tracy maintaining her sanity outside of the workplace.

The concept of resetting at the end of the day is applicable to not only self-care but also instruction and classroom management. Approaching each school day as a new day, a new opportunity to make an impact on students, is a strategy used to mitigate any challenges experienced the previous day. Evelyn appreciates that her students have short-term memory with respect to what happens in her class every day:

You walk into a classroom on a Tuesday and kids don't remember what you did on Monday. They don't remember you sent them to the principal's office. They don't remember that you gave them pizza. It's a new day. Especially when they're younger. (Evelyn, Supports Interview, May 23, 2016)

Evelyn uses her downtime at the end of each day to reflect on her effectiveness and modify her practices to produce better outcomes the next day. Through her reflection, Evelyn can modify her practice to reintroduce content in a different way or to manage student behavior in a more productive way the next day.

### Summary

The findings of this study demonstrate that the decision to persist in the teaching profession in urban schools is highly personalized and contingent upon a multitude of factors specific to a teacher's individual experience. The also highlight the difficulty of adequately defining what persistence means for African-American teachers and providing a prescription for teacher retention that can be applied to novice African-American teachers in urban schools across the country. The stories of

Evelyn, Tracy, Sandra and Terrence underscore the challenge of teacher education programs, administrators, and policymakers to create an archetype of the novice African-American teacher and prescribe a boilerplate action plan to promote teacher persistence. The following chapter will provide a synthesis of the interview and collage data framed by the literature on SCCT and novice teacher persistence, implications for future research, and policy & practice recommendations to promote novice African-American teacher persistence.

## Chapter 6: Discussion

### Overview

The purpose of the study was to examine the contextual factors that novice African-American teachers encounter as they navigate their early years of teaching in urban school settings. In particular, the study explored the personal characteristics, background experiences, and contextual challenges & supports proximal to the teaching experience of four early-career teachers in urban schools across the country. The primary research question of this study was as follows: *How do personal, background, and contextual factors influence teaching career persistence for a group of novice African-American teachers in urban school settings?* A collective case study approach (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2009) was used to investigate the quintain of novice urban African-American teacher persistence. Four novice African-American teachers from urban school districts across the country served as individual cases for the study.

Social cognitive career theory (SCCT; Lent et al, 1994, 2000, 2002) was used as the theoretical framework for the present study. Guiding questions were employed to gain a better understanding of the personal factors, background experiences, and contextual influences that presented during teachers' early years of teaching:

- How do the pre-college, pre-service, and in-service experiences of novice African-American teachers influence their teaching career persistence?
- Which personal, background, and contextual factors are most impactful to African-American teachers' choice to persist during their first three years of teaching in urban school settings?

- How do novice African-American teachers mitigate apparent and perceived challenges to career persistence?

Each selected teacher completed in-depth interviews and digital collages to help frame the novice urban African-American teacher experience, citing the supports, barriers, and mitigating strategies encountered during their early years of teaching. Individual and cross-case analyses were performed to gain a better understanding of the quintain of novice urban African-American teacher persistence.

Overall, the findings of the present study reinforce the importance of interpersonal relationships and contextual commitments in choices of career persistence. Simply put, the people within a teacher's personal and professional networks can make or break their teaching career. The teaching environment serves as the most proximal influence on teaching and career persistence. Participating teachers cited school culture, out-of-school influences, and difficulties with administrators as major barriers and challenges to career persistence; family & community support, role models & mentors, teaching philosophy, and respect from parents & students were cited as primary supports and motivators of career persistence. Teachers employed the strategies of self-care, seeking support from professional networks, and finding opportunities to connect with their students to mitigate apparent and perceived challenges to their career persistence.

Novice African-American teachers enter the teaching profession and return year after year out of a commitment to student success and the desire to help students of color reach their fullest potentials. Their desire to persist in teaching is also confirmed and affirmed through their relationships with family members, colleagues,



and professional mentors. However, difficult relationships with administrators and colleagues, as well as the increased foci on accountability and standardization, push teachers committed to social justice out of schools -- whether they move to new teaching assignments or new career paths entirely. Based on the findings of the study and the chosen theoretical framework, a modified social cognitive model of teaching career persistence has emerged.

*A New Social Cognitive Model for Teaching Career Persistence*

A modified social cognitive model of teaching career persistence can be viewed in Figure 11. As in the original social cognitive theory created by Bandura (1986, 1989) and the expanded social cognitive career theory modeled by Lent et al

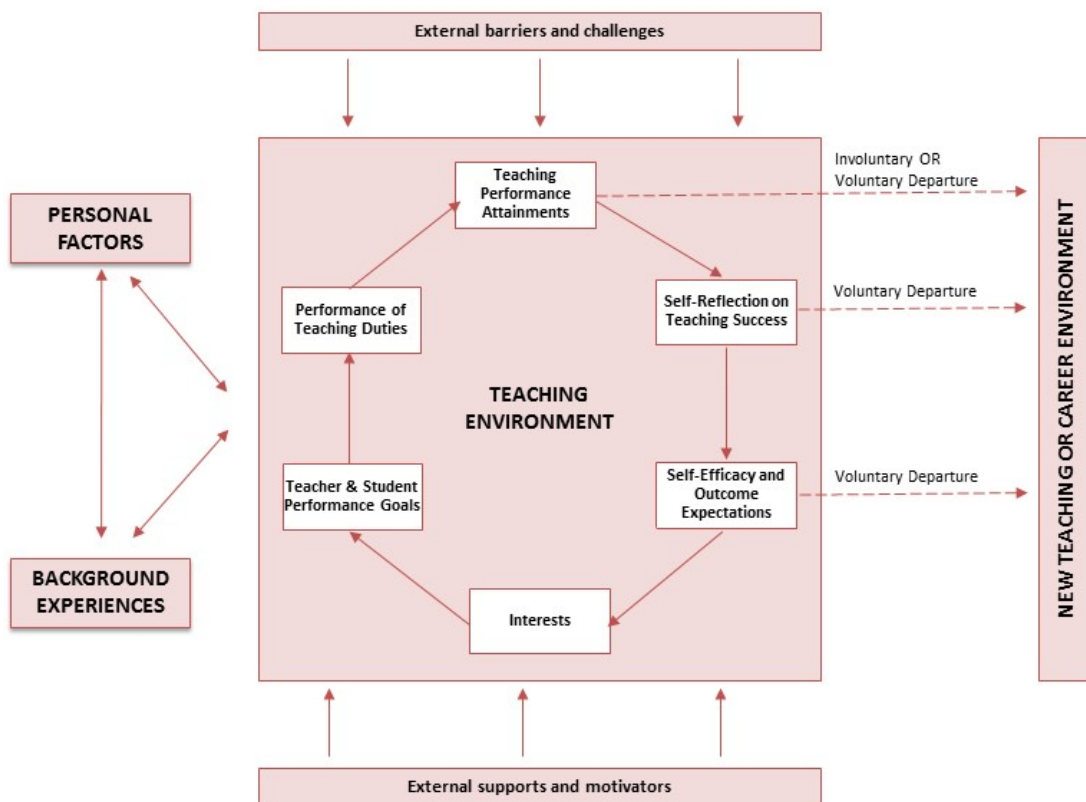


Figure 11. Modified social cognitive theory of teaching career persistence. Adapted from Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1994, 2000, 2002.

(1994, 2000, 2002), personal characteristics and background experiences are integral components of the model. However, based on the findings of the study, the teaching environment serves a more prominent role in novice African-American teachers' choice to persist in the teaching profession. Teachers' choices to persist are based on the development of teacher and student performance goals, which influence their performance of teaching duties and, ultimately, their performance attainments. The development of goals and teaching duties, as well as the resulting performance attainments, occur within the context of the teaching environment. Urban public schools are contextually different from suburban or rural public schools; they are also contextually different from urban private schools and urban parochial schools. Contextual factors such as student demographics, school culture, funding per pupil, accountability measures, and school choice contribute to overall environment in which teachers perform their jobs.

The solid lines within the model represent career trajectories when teachers choose to persist; teachers within a supportive environment where their teaching abilities and student success are affirmed are more likely to persist than teachers in less supportive teaching environments. The dotted lines represent career trajectories when teachers leave the profession. Departure decisions are influenced by teaching performance attainments, self-reflection on the teaching process, and evaluation of self-efficacy and outcome expectations. Teachers transfer to new teaching environments or leave the profession entirely when their performance attainment does not meet the expectations that they set for themselves or the expectations that administrators set for them. Lower-than-expected performance attainments from the

perspective of administrators can lead to involuntary departure from a school site; low performance attainment and poor self-evaluation can lead to teachers voluntarily changing their teaching environment or leaving the profession altogether.

The researcher's preliminary assertion that the evaluation of teaching performance occurs naturally at the end of the school year was partially affirmed. Performance attainments, self-reflection on teaching success, and evaluation of self-efficacy & outcome expectations can occur at multiple points throughout the school year. As seen in the findings, participating teachers evaluated their performance year-round, not solely at the end of the school year. Performance attainment can be measured based on performance over a small period of time; for example, a teacher's ability to control student behavior or teach a segment of an instructional unit to their class may serve as a unit of analysis for performance attainment and self-evaluation. Conversely, performance attainment can also be measured over the course of an entire school year; summative student assessments and end-of-year performance evaluations are examples of year-long evaluative measures. Feedback from administrators, mentors, and colleagues may appear throughout the school year or at the end of the year. Teachers may find themselves in the evaluative process multiple times in one year -- or possibly multiple times in one day.

Comparable to how teacher choices are informed by the teaching environment, interactions within the teaching environment are influenced by supports and barriers external to the teaching environment. These external supports and barriers also guide teachers' interpretations of the teaching environment. Teacher performance is indirectly influenced by the socioeconomic and societal challenges

their students faced on a daily basis. Participating teachers referenced poverty, homelessness, illness, family structure, parental presence, and crime as out-of-school influences on their students' (and ultimately their own) success. Teacher performance is also influenced by pressures from district and state leaders to demonstrate their effectiveness in promoting positive student outcomes. Mandates such as statewide assessments, standardized curricula, and recent changes to content standards lead teachers to relinquish their autonomy and resent these changes despite organizational intentions. Teachers rely on their support networks -- family members, role models, supportive colleagues and mentors -- to counterbalance the out-of-school influences on their classroom experiences.

Although novice African-American teachers in urban schools come to the classroom with varying personal, background, and environmental experiences, it is important to recognize that persistence is heavily predicated on their perceptions of the teaching environment and the level of support provided to them during their early teaching careers. Further efforts to support novice urban teachers should take into account the need for mentoring and induction support constant across all contexts with additional contextual supports based on the teaching environment as well as the capabilities of the receiving school site.

### Limitations

Although the findings of this study add to the body of literature on novice African-American teacher persistence in urban schools, a few limitations were observed. A primary limitation to this study was the bounding of the findings to a

finely-tailored conceptual framework. While SCCT aptly categorized the perceived and apparent influences on novice African-American teachers in urban settings, alternative interpretations of the findings may have been observed if a grounded-theory approach was employed. Future studies examining novice African-American teacher persistence examining issues related to other theoretical frameworks such as critical race theory, intersectionality, and personal agency would add additional context and clarity to the emergent themes that became apparent after a review of the data outside of the SCCT frame.

Despite an extensive recruitment effort via word-of-mouth and social media, it was difficult to recruit African-American teachers in urban school districts who met the study criteria. A total of 20 teachers responded to the call for participants posted between February 2016 and May 2016; however, only 11 teachers had the requisite three to five years of teaching experience and were currently teaching in urban districts. All 11 teachers participated in an introductory interview and yielded seven consenting participants. Over the course of the interview period, however, two teachers did not complete the second interview and collage. One teacher submitted her barriers collage but was unable to commit to an interview date. The final consenting teacher did not submit any collages or participate in the required interviews. The final sample included four teachers working in four different geographical areas. While these teachers provided rich data for analysis and further insight into the novice urban African-American teacher experience, additional participants from different areas of the country -- or multiple participants from the same area -- would have provided a richer data set from which to study the quintain.

The research design included self-reported data as primary data sources. The study design did not include interviews of other important co-participants, such as current & former coworkers, mentors, administrators, parents and students. The viewpoint of the participant is biased in their favor; additional data from other members of the teaching environment would paint a more vivid picture of the novice African-American teacher experience.

Classroom observations were not included as part of the study due to the researcher's primary location and locations of teachers who consented to participated in the study. Travel and time constraints limited the ability of the researcher and study participants to meet in person. Similar to the justification for additional data from other members of each teacher's work environment, classroom observations would have provided additional insight into the influence of teacher practice on self-evaluations of teacher performance, teacher self-efficacy, and teaching outcome expectations.

Interviews were conducted between February 2016 and June 2016. A longer study period – preferably one which starts in August and ends in June/July -- would follow teachers from the beginning of the school year to the end of the school year; periodic check-ins with teachers over the course of the year would provide insight on when particular factors are more impactful to teachers' decisions to persist.

It is the hope of the researcher that future research will examine the phenomenon of novice African-American teacher persistence in urban settings through an expansion of teacher locations, a larger participant count, and a longer study period.

### *Recommendation for Policy and Practice*

The following recommendations are based on the researcher's review of the findings, as well as feedback received from study participants that may improve the experiences of future African-American teachers in urban public schools.

Recommendations will be presented for prospective African-American teachers in urban settings, teacher education pathways, and urban school districts to improve the retention of African-American teachers across all levels of experience in urban schools.

#### *Recommendations for Future African-American Teachers in Urban Schools*

##### **1. Evaluate personal reasons for entering the teaching profession:**

The choice to enter into the teaching profession should not be taken lightly. Teacher turnover have direct implications for distributions in teacher quality, student academic outcomes, and school functioning (Guin, 2004; Hanushek, Kain & Rivkin 2004; Ronfield, Loeb & Wyckoff 2013). Today's students deserve teachers who are committed to remaining in schools for at least three years to promote continuity in instruction and stability in teaching staff.

**2. Obtain teacher preparation through a program that is aligned with your teaching philosophy:** Teaching philosophy kept the novice teacher participants focused on persistence despite the challenges they faced in the classroom. By receiving preparation through a teacher certification program aligned on teaching philosophy, prospective teachers will be exposed to faculty, urban teachers, and fellow pre-service teachers who have similar mindsets about teaching and education

in urban settings. If you are interesting in remaining in the profession for the long term, a more comprehensive approach to teacher preparation which includes longer programs of study prior to student teaching and a longer practicum experience would provide better preparation for career teachers.

**3. Foster connections with program faculty, urban teachers, and professional support networks:** The relationships forged during teacher preparation can serve as support mechanisms once teachers have started their teaching careers. All of the study participants developed strong relationships with former teachers and mentors, continuing those relationships for years after their formal partnerships ended. Novice teachers with larger support networks have additional resources to contact when in need of support during their formative teaching years. Similarly, it is important for novice teachers to continue the tradition of pre-service and new teacher support, continuing the cycle of support to those teachers who follow behind them.

*Recommendations for Teacher Education Pathways for Prospective African-American Urban Teachers*

**1. Provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to complete their student teaching practicum in urban schools:** Prospective teachers interested in working with students of color in urban schools should enroll in a teacher preparation program that is adequately equipped to prepare them for the rigors of urban education. As stated previously, the contextual factors encountered in urban public schools is different from schools of different types and locales. Student teaching experiences in urban schools would provide prospective teachers with real-time



experience in comparable settings to their future placements. Completing teacher preparation in a program designed to prepare urban teachers will also help correct any misconceptions about the urban teaching environment and provide exposure to the urban teaching experience prior to program completion.

**2. Partner with urban schools that value your mission to support urban educators:** As prospective teachers are recommended to select teacher preparation programs that align with their teaching philosophy, teacher education programs should facilitate partnerships with urban schools that are aligned with their programmatic missions. Teacher preparation programs geared towards empowering teachers to address issues of social justice through education should partner with schools that want similar mindsets in their teachers. This would not only provide a good fit for program graduates but would also provide a pipeline for qualified teachers who are already known to mesh with the school culture.

#### *Recommendations for Urban Schools & School Districts*

**1. Provide mentoring and induction support to new and early-career teachers:** The transition from pre-service to in-service is drastic and difficult to novice teachers. The results of the present study confirm that induction and mentor support are critical to novice teacher retention regardless of school location (Huisman, Singer, & Catapano, 2010; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). A formal mentoring and induction program at the school or district level would ensure that new teachers had at least one person on whom they could rely to provide advice and support throughout their first year of teaching.

**2. Create networking opportunities for teachers of color:** Peer mentorship and networking can also prove beneficial to new teachers of color, particularly in school districts where teachers of color are a racial and numerical minority. Building communities of teachers can foster collaboration in the classroom, a shared avenue for obtaining advice, and opportunities to de-stress with colleagues who are keenly familiar with the particular struggles for urban educators of color.

**3. Offer professional development opportunities on key challenges experienced by new teachers within your district:** New teachers are often confounded by unexpected challenges that were not reviewed during pre-service training. Continuous professional development -- whether it is sponsored by the school site or by the school district -- should focus on relevant issues to the population that the school or district serves. Because contextual factors inherent and proximal to the school environment have the greatest impact on teacher retention, providing support for potential pitfalls can prove critical to any strategic plans to promote novice teacher retention in urban districts.

**4. Encourage collaboration between teachers, parents, students, and the greater school community:** Participating teachers found support from the respect of parents and students. Often, teachers feel unappreciated or underappreciated for the work that they do. Simple gestures of support and collaboration between teachers and the school community would greatly improve teacher-community relations and promote novice teacher persistence.

**5. Utilize evaluation and feedback matrices that fairly evaluates novice teachers on various aspects of instruction and classroom management:**

Evaluations are extremely stressful to teachers, especially newer teachers.

Participating teachers expressed concern over unfair evaluations of performance and a lack of feedback on how to improve. Clear expectations for the implementation of grade-level content and classroom management should be set with novice teachers so they have an idea of how they will be evaluated. In addition, providing feedback throughout the school year -- not limited to formal evaluation periods -- will foster positive reinforcement for great work and keep critical areas of improvement at the forefront of their planning.

**6. Provide adequate support to new and transitioning administrators on how to effectively manage staff:** Just as new teachers need sufficient training and onboarding to assume their role, first-time administrators as well as reassigned administrators should receive training on their specific school contexts and how to lead their teaching staff. One of the major complaints voiced by participating teachers was that some administrators did not provide adequate support and feedback to them during their early years of teaching. Unfortunately, this period is a critical period for reinforcing positive behaviors and correcting ineffective methods. One of the teachers participating in the study specifically cited his conflicts with administration as his reason for transitioning into an alternative career path in education. Given the limited number of African-American teachers in urban schools, it is critical that administrators provide much-needed support to these teachers to promote their retention.

### Implications for Future Research

The findings of the present study provide valuable insight into the quintain of novice African-American teacher persistence in urban schools. Further research on this novice teacher population can provide additional information to support novice African-American teacher persistence in urban cities across the country. A replication study to test the findings of this study can reinforce the validity of the present findings. Future studies should be designed to utilize a larger sample of novice African-American teachers -- either multiple cases from a select geographical area or additional single cases from multiple areas -- to highlight additional contexts for novice African-American teacher development.

The present study examines teachers across grade levels and content areas. Studies focusing on novice African-American teachers in a specific content area would produce finely-tailored data for teachers based on the intricacies of their chosen content area. In addition, there is strong interest in the experiences of male African-American teachers and their persistence in the field. Three female teachers and one male teacher were included in the present study; however, the sole male participant expressed the need to take a closer look at the African-American male teacher experience in urban settings. The intersection of gender, race, and teaching locale would be particularly interesting for male African-American teachers in urban settings, given that there are fewer African-American males in teaching than African-American females.

Participants were interviewed between February 2016 and June 2016. The short span of time between interviews provides an unnatural boundary for evaluating

contextual factors to teacher persistence. The data obtained is heavily biased towards influence proximal to the time of year and the issues relevant at the time of the interview. For example, Tracy's barriers interview focused heavily on her performance evaluation, which was conducted within a few days of the interview. Longitudinal studies on the changes in contextual impacts based on time of year and total years of experience would provide data relative to which issues are most prevalent at varying points throughout the school year for teachers of varied levels of experience. This would greatly assist schools and districts with providing tailored professional development at targeted points of challenge throughout the school year.

Surprisingly, all four teachers who participated in this study teachers attended historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs): three at the undergraduate level, one at the graduate level. Further study is recommended to study the persistence decisions of teachers who attended HBCUs versus those who attend predominately White institutions (PWIs). How does attendance at an HBCU correspond with teaching philosophies rooted in social justice? How does teacher preparation at an HBCU differ from the training received at a PWI or an alternative program not linked to an institution of higher education? Given the legacy of HBCUs in promoting social justice and equity for African-Americans, do teachers trained with a teaching philosophy of social justice experience longer tenures in the teaching profession than those with philosophies of other types?

Lastly, the novice urban African-American teachers in the current study taught in school districts that served predominantly African-American populations. Additional studies of novice African-American teachers in predominantly non-

African-American urban classrooms would expand the literature on novice African-American teacher persistence by examining their performance in contexts where they are the racial and numerical minority. The experiences of novice African-American teachers in any context are valuable to the growing body of literature on novice teacher persistence. Hopefully, the findings presented here will lead to improved supports for novice African-American teachers in urban schools and, in turn, a stronger, more experienced, and more diverse teacher workforce for the students who need high-quality teachers the most.

## Appendices

### Appendix A: Online Recruitment Post for Study Participants

Hello. My name is Dawn Sherman and I am a Ph.D. Candidate in Organizational Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Maryland - College Park. I am conducting a study of early-career African-American teachers to explore why African-American teachers choose to remain in the profession after their first three years of teaching in urban settings. As the daughter of an African-American public school teacher and a former advisor to pre-service teachers, I am very interested in the novice teacher experience and the overall retention of novice African-American teachers.

I am currently looking for teachers to participate in this study. To be eligible for the study, teachers must meet the following criteria:

- Are currently teaching in a public school located in an urban school district,
- Identify as Black or African-American,
- Have between three years and five years of full-time professional teaching experience exclusively in urban settings, and
- Intend to remain in the teaching profession after the current school year.

As part of the research study, participants will be asked to complete two interviews in person or via Skype about their pre-service and in-service experiences. In addition, participants will be asked to create two photo collages that depict the supports and barriers they encountered during their first three years of teaching. Teachers who are selected to participate in the interviews will receive \$75 upon completion of the study.

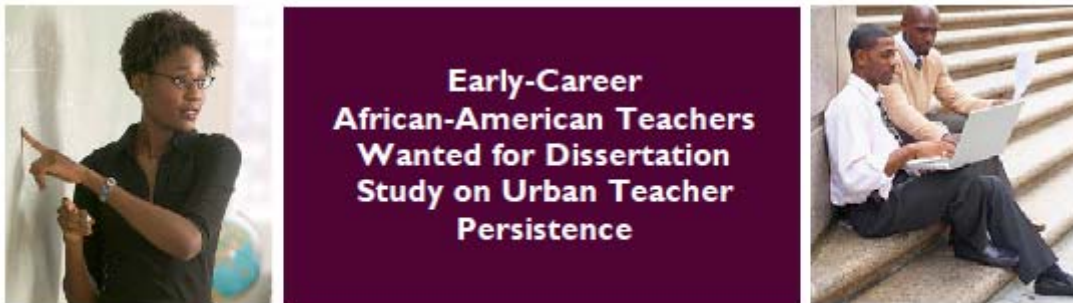
If you feel that you may be a good candidate for this study, please complete a brief online questionnaire at the link below. If you know of others who may be good candidates for this study, please share the link and attached flyer within your networks. Participation in this research is entirely optional and all information provided is 100% confidential. Questionnaire responses from non-selected participants will be destroyed.

If you have any questions about the present study, please send me a direct message at [sherman7@umd.edu](mailto:sherman7@umd.edu).

Thank you in advance for your time and your dedication to urban public schools.

Best,  
Dawn Sherman

Appendix B: Recruitment Flyer (shared electronically via attachment to recruitment posts)



I am conducting a research study of early-career African-American teachers to explore why African-American teachers choose to remain in the profession after their first three to five years of teaching in urban schools.

To be eligible for the study, teachers must meet the following criteria:

- Are currently teaching in a public school located in an urban public school district,
- Identify as Black or African-American,
- Have between three years and five years of full-time professional teaching experience,
- Have taught exclusively in urban schools, and
- Intend to remain in the teaching profession after the current school year.



As part of the research study, participants will be asked to complete two 90-minute interviews in person or via Skype about their pre-service and in-service experiences. In addition, participants will be asked to create two digital photo collages that depict the supports and barriers they encountered during their early teaching careers. Teachers who are selected to participate in the interviews will receive \$75 for their participation in the study.

If interested, please complete a brief pre-screening questionnaire at <http://goo.gl/PrgAmS> or scan the QR code above. Participation in this research is entirely optional and all information provided is 100% confidential. Questionnaire responses from non-selected participants will be destroyed.

For more information, please contact Dawn Sherman, Ph.D. Candidate, at 240.988.1683 or [sherman7@umd.edu](mailto:sherman7@umd.edu).

*This research project has been approved by the University of Maryland College Park (UMCP) Institutional Review Board (Project #425238-1).*

Early-Career African-American  
Teacher Persistence Study  
<http://goo.gl/PrgAmS>  
Contact: Dawn Sherman  
240.988.1683  
[sherman7@umd.edu](mailto:sherman7@umd.edu)

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Appendix C: Pre-Screening Questionnaire  
(adapted from Salomon, 2010; Torcivia, 2012)

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**Persistence of Early-Career African-American Teachers in Urban Schools**  
(<http://goo.gl/PrgAmS>)

Thank you for your interest in participating in a research study being conducted by Dawn Sherman exploring why early-career African-American teachers remain in the teaching profession after their first three years of teaching in urban public school districts. To be eligible for the study, teachers must meet the following criteria:

- Are currently employed as teacher in an urban public school district,
- Identify as Black or African-American,
- Have between three years and five years of full-time professional teaching experience exclusively in urban settings, and
- Intend to remain in the teaching profession after the current school year.

Please complete the following survey to assist the researcher in determining your eligibility. This survey should take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

**Part I: Demographics**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender:

- Male
- Female
- Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

Race / Ethnicity (check all that apply):

- American Indian / Alaska Native
- African-American / Black
- Asian
- Hispanic
- Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander
- White
- Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

Were you born and raised in the United States?

- Yes

- No

Were both of your parents born and raised in the United States?

- Yes
- No, mother only
- No, father only
- No, neither parent

Hometown (City / State): \_\_\_\_\_

Marital status:

- Single, never married
- Married / domestic partnership
- Widowed
- Divorced
- Separated
- I choose not to disclose

Do you have any children?

- Yes
- No
- I choose not to disclose

If YES, please list their ages: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Part II: Family Characteristics**

Please choose the option that best describes your household during your K-12 years:

- Single-parent household
- Two-parent household
- Raised by another family member (e.g., sibling, aunt/uncle, grandparent(s))
- Ward of the state/foster care
- Other (please describe): \_\_\_\_\_
- I choose not to disclose

What is/was your MOTHER's highest level of education?

- Unknown
- Less than high school
- Some high school
- High school diploma / GED
- Some college
- Associate's degree

- Bachelor's degree
- Graduate certificate
- Master's degree
- Professional degree (e.g., M.D., J.D., D.D.S.)
- Ph.D. or equivalent (e.g., Ed.D., Psyc.D.)

What is/was your MOTHER's most recent occupation? \_\_\_\_\_

What is/was your FATHER's highest level of education?

- Unknown
- Less than high school
- Some high school
- High school diploma / GED
- Some college
- Associate's degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Graduate certificate
- Master's degree
- Professional degree (e.g., M.D., J.D., D.D.S.)
- Ph.D. or equivalent (e.g., Ed.D., Psyc.D.)

What is/was your FATHER's most recent occupation? \_\_\_\_\_

During your K-12 years, did your family own or rent the home you lived in?

- Own (with or without a mortgage)
- Rent
- I do not know

### **Part III: Educational experiences**

Did you attend any urban public schools during your K-12 education?

- Yes
- No

If YES, which level(s) of your K-12 education did you complete in an urban public school?

- Elementary school
- Middle/junior high school
- High school

Where did you complete your undergraduate studies? (Name of institution / City / State)

\_\_\_\_\_

What type of teacher certification program did you complete?

- Undergraduate-level traditional certification program
- Graduate-level traditional certification program
- Alternative certification program (e.g., Teach for America, Urban Teacher Project)

Which institution or organization hosted your teacher certification program? (Name of institution or organization / City / State): \_\_\_\_\_

Did you complete a student teaching internship or practicum experience?

- Yes
- No

If YES, in which type of school did you complete your internship or practicum?

- Urban
- Suburban
- Rural
- Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Part IV: Teaching experience**

Which grade level(s) are you certified to teach? (check all that apply)

- Early childhood (Birth to Grade 3)
- Elementary (Grades 3 through 6)
- Middle School (Grades 5 through 8)
- High school (Grades 9 through 12)

If MIDDLE or HIGH SCHOOL, in which content area(s) are you certified to teach?

\_\_\_\_\_

Which grade level(s) do you currently teach? (check all that apply)

- Early childhood (Birth to Grade 3)
- Elementary (Grades 3 through 6)
- Middle School (Grades 5 through 8)
- High school (Grades 9 through 12)
- Not currently teaching

If MIDDLE or HIGH SCHOOL, which subject(s) do you currently teach?

\_\_\_\_\_

Are you currently teaching in an urban public school district?

- Yes
- No

How many years of full-time teaching experience do you have in an urban public school district? \_\_\_\_\_

Did you begin your teaching career in an urban public school district?

- Yes
- No

If YES, in which school district did you begin your teaching career?

\_\_\_\_\_

Are you currently teaching in the school district in which you started?

- Yes
- No

If NO, in which school district are you currently teaching? \_\_\_\_\_

Have you transferred schools or taken a break from teaching since beginning your teaching career?

- Yes
- No

If YES:

- How many times have you transferred schools? \_\_\_\_\_
- How many times have you taken a break from teaching? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you plan to teach in an urban public school district during the 2016-2017 school year?

- Yes
- No

### **Part V: Survey Completion**

Thank you for your interest in participating in this research study about the career persistence of early-career African-American teachers in urban public schools.

As part of the research study, you will be asked to complete two interviews in person or via Skype about the barriers and supports that you encountered during your first three years of teaching in urban public schools. In addition, you will be asked to create two photo collages

that depict the various factors that influence your persistence in the field. You will receive \$75 for your participation in the study.

If you would like to be considered for the study, please enter your contact information below and the researcher will be in touch with you shortly. If you have any questions about the present study, please contact Dawn Sherman at [sherman7@umd.edu](mailto:sherman7@umd.edu).

Name:

Phone number:

Email address:

**Interview #1: Pre-Service Influences and In-Service Supports & Motivators for Novice Urban Teacher Persistence**

1. Tell me about the factors that motivated you to enter the teaching profession.

*Probes:*

- Intrinsic motivators (e.g., social justice, “making a difference”)
- Extrinsic motivators (e.g., “summer’s off,” salary, recognition)
- Former teachers/family members as teaching role models
- Previous teaching/learning experiences
- Prior work experiences
- Family support/encouragement
- Other prospective career opportunities besides teaching

2. Describe your pre-service teacher training experience.

*Probes:*

- Traditional vs. alternative certification program
- Urban-centric focus
- Minority-student focus
- Internship/practicum experience
- Adequacy of preparation for teaching in urban schools

3. On a scale of 1-10 (with 10 being the highest), how would you rate your preparedness and self-efficacy in teaching immediately after completion of your teacher certification program?

*Probes:*

- Which factors influenced your rating?
- What could you have done to improve your sense of preparedness at that time?
- What could your teacher preparation program have done to improve your sense of preparedness at that time?

4. Describe your thought process while creating your photo collage.

*Probes:*

- Which supports and motivators came to mind when you first started thinking about your persistence in the field?

- Rationale for choice of supports & motivators
  - Rationale for relative sizes and placement of photos
5. Tell me about the supports and motivators from your first three years of teaching that you have depicted in your collage.

*Probes:*

- What does each photo represent?
  - Why was this photo chosen as opposed to other depictions of the selected support/motivator?
  - Describe the impact of the selected factor on your persistence in the field.
  - Tell me about a specific instance or event in which this factor played a role in your teaching experience.
6. If you could rank the supports and motivators represented in your collage with respect to their influence on your persistence (with “1” representing the most impactful factor), how would you rank these factors?

*Probe:*

- Explain your ranking.
7. Reflect on your experiences with the following supports and motivators that can be particularly beneficial for early-career teachers. *[include any items that were not previously highlighted in the collage]*

*Probes:*

- Mentoring and induction
  - Supportive professional culture
  - Familial obligations
  - Pre-service motivators (e.g., intrinsic/extrinsic, role models, previous work experiences, teacher preparation)
8. How do your personal characteristics influence (or not influence) your choice to continue teaching in urban schools?
9. How do your background experiences influence (or not influence) your choice to continue teaching in urban schools?
10. How has the impact of your supports and motivators changed since you began your teaching career?

*Probes:*



- Have any motivators or supports become increasingly impactful over time?
  - Have any motivators or supports become less impactful or not impactful at all?
11. Are there any other supporting or motivating factors that you were unable to include in your collage but come to mind as part of our interview today?

--- End of Interview #1 ---

**Interview #2: In-Services Barriers and Challenges to Novice Urban Teacher Persistence**

1. Describe your thought process while creating your photo collage.

*Probes:*

- Which barriers and challenges came to mind when you first started thinking about your persistence in the field?
  - Rationale for choice of barriers & challenges
  - Rationale for relative sizes and placement of photos
2. Tell me about the barriers and challenges from your first three years of teaching that you have depicted in your collage.

*Probes:*

- What does each photo represent?
  - Why was this photo chosen as opposed to other depictions of the selected barrier/challenge?
  - Describe the impact of the selected barrier/challenge on your persistence in the field.
  - Tell me about a specific instance or event in which this factor manifested itself during your first three years of teaching.
  - How do you address these barriers/challenges?
3. How have these barriers and challenges impacted your self-efficacy as an educator (if at all)?

*Probes:*

- Have you considered leaving the profession at any point during your first three years?
- Which factor(s) in particular made you consider leaving?
- What changed your mind?

4. If you could rank the barriers and challenges represented in your collage with respect to their influence on your persistence (with “1” representing the most impactful factor), how would you rank these factors?

*Probe:*

- Explain your ranking.
5. Are there any other barriers or challenges that you were unable to include in your collage but come to mind as part of our interview today?
  6. Reflect on your experiences with the following factors that can be particularly challenging for early-career teachers. *[include any items that were not previously highlighted in the collage]*

*Probes:*

- School locale
  - Student demographics
  - Parental/community support
  - Access to adequate facilities and resources
  - Student performance on classwork/standardized tests
  - Teacher performance reviews
  - Availability of other job opportunities
  - Salary differentials
  - Professional culture
  - Classroom management/student behavior
  - Increased workload
  - Stress/burnout
6. How has the impact of your barriers and challenges changed since you began your teaching career?

*Probes:*

- Have any barriers or challenges become increasingly impactful over time?
  - Have any barriers or challenges become less impactful or not impactful at all?
7. Despite the barriers and challenges that you have highlighted, why do you choose to stay in the classroom?

8. Based on your experiences as a novice African-American teacher in an urban school, what recommendations would you give to improve novice African-American teacher persistence?

*Probes:*

- Teacher preparation programs
- School/district leadership
- Families & community partners
- Novice African-American teachers

9. What are your future plans?

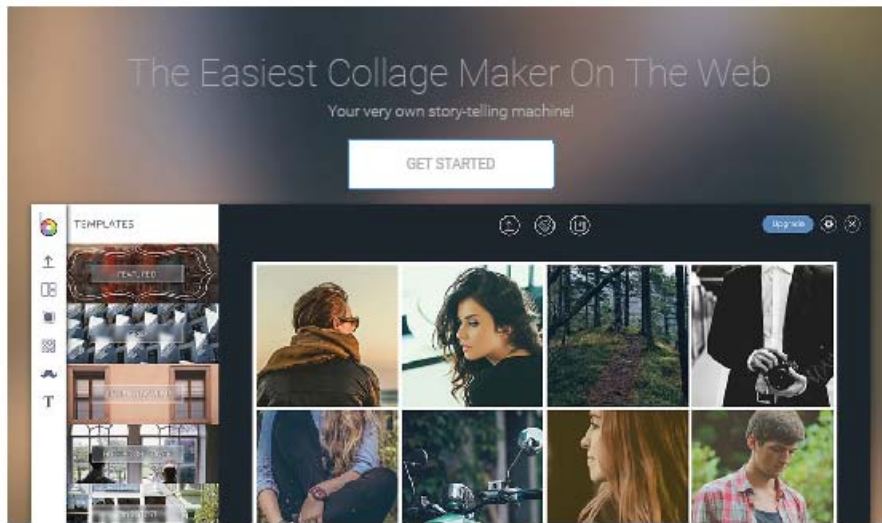
*Probes:*

- How long do you plan to teach in an urban setting?
- Do you anticipate moving to another school site or leaving the classroom for administrative role?
- Do you anticipate leaving the profession in the foreseeable future?  
What factors may contribute to your departure from the education sector?

10. Do you have anything else to add with respect to your persistence as a novice African-American teacher in an urban setting?

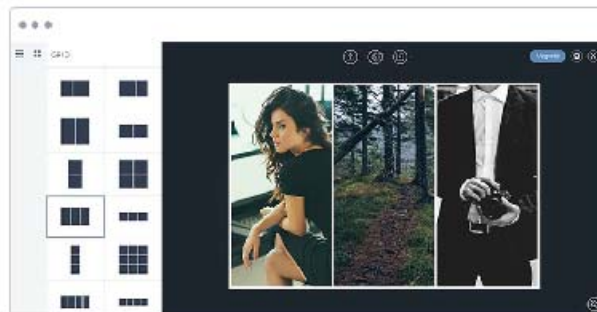
**--- End of Interview #2 ---**

## Appendix E: BeFunky Digital Photo Collaging Software



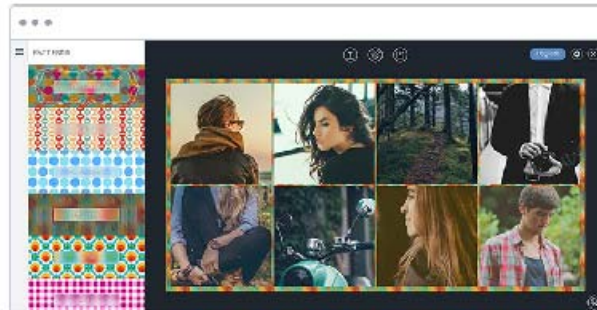
### THE BEST TEMPLATES OF ANY COLLAGE MAKER

If a picture is worth a thousand words, what's a photo collage worth? BeFunky's Collage Maker empowers you to create breathtaking online photo collage using more than 50 striking templates. We also have templates designed especially for Pinterest and Facebook, so your posts will stand out from the crowd. Arrange your photos to tell a story - one that's uniquely yours.



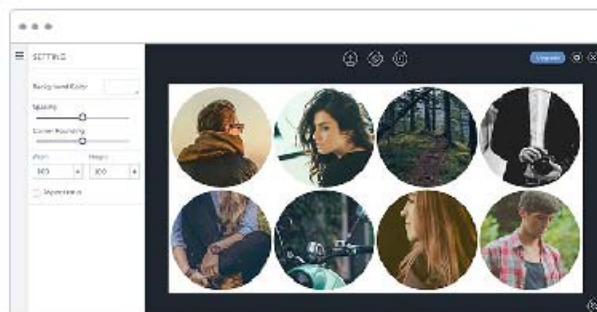
## ENDLESS OPTIONS

BeFunky offers an incredible array of tools to enhance your photos and customize your photo collage. Change the background color, add an elegant pattern, or speak up loud and clear with text in an eye-catching font. Create a masterpiece unlike anything else.



## THE FUN COLLAGE MAKER

With BeFunky's effortless editing tools, expressing yourself never feels like work. Our Online Collage Maker also integrates seamlessly with our photo editor, so you can use any of more than 200 signature effects to make your photos unforgettable. There's no limit to what BeFunky can help you create.



## HOW TO CREATE YOUR COLLAGE IN 4 EASY STEPS

Creating a photo collage is a really easy process thanks to BeFunky's world famous Collage Maker!

**01.**

Open your photos in  
BeFunky's Collage Maker

**02.**

Drag and drop your photos  
into your collage template

**03.**

Customize your background/  
border colors and patterns,  
add photo effects, graphics,  
and text

**04.**

Save your collage to your  
computer, Facebook, Google  
Drive, and more!

# BeFunky Collage Maker

GET STARTED

#### FEATURES

Photo Editor  
Collage Maker  
Graphic Designer  
Mobile Apps

#### TOOLS

Photo Effects  
Photo To Art  
Text Editor  
Photo Frames

#### COMPANY

About  
Press  
Blog  
Careers

#### MY ACCOUNT

My Photos  
Explore  
BeFunky Plus  
Superstar

#### SUPPORT

FAQ  
Contact  
Terms Of Use  
Privacy Policy



© 2007–2015 BeFunky.com

English (US)



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## Appendix F: Collage Instruction Guide for Participants



BeFunky is an online photo editing and collaging software suite that allows users to upload, edit, publish, and share digital photos, collages, graphics, and more. Study participants will primarily use the **BeFunky Collage Maker** (<https://www.befunky.com/features/collage-maker/>) and **Photo Editor** (<https://www.befunky.com/features/photo-editor/>) tools.

Study participants will receive access to the BeFunky Plus desktop application, which provides access to featured grid options for your collages, over 100 additional digital photo effects, and over 350 additional graphics and photo frames. To access your BeFunky account, please visit <http://www.befunky.com> and sign in using the account information noted below:

Username:	<u>          NATeacherXX          </u>
Password:	<u>          urbaneducatorXX          </u>

A free BeFunky mobile app is also available to assist with uploading photos to your BeFunky account directly from your mobile phone. This app may be downloaded from iTunes or the Google Store.

### SYSTEM RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Microsoft Windows 7/8/10, Mac OS X or Linux, with a 1GHz processor or better
- At least 512 MB of RAM
- A web browser such as Internet Explorer version 9.0 or higher, Firefox 10.0 or higher, Safari 4.0 or higher, or Google Chrome 14.0 or higher
- The latest Adobe Flash Player installed on your computer [NOTE: You can check your version and download the latest one for free at Adobe Flash Player website (<https://www.adobe.com/software/flash/about/>).]
- A screen resolution of 1024 x 768 pixels or higher is recommended to make it easier to work

**VIDEO TUTORIAL:** <https://goo.gl/v4V3tz>

---

### GUIDELINES FOR CREATING YOUR PHOTO COLLAGES

As part of the study, you will be asked to create **TWO** photo collages:

- Collage #1: *Motivators and Supports During Your Novice Urban Teaching Experience*
- Collage #2: *Barriers and Challenges Encountered During Your Novice Urban Teaching Experience*

#### Photo Collage Specifications:

- Select at least four photos that depict people, locations, events, or considerations related to each collage topic.
- The photographs can be historical (e.g., a graduation picture) or present-day (e.g., a picture of your classroom).
- Select a BeFunky collage grid that includes placeholders for at least **FOUR** photos.
- You can use the Photo Editor to make minor corrections to your photos, such as cropping or recoloring, but do not retouch the subject of the photo.
- You are free to use additional grid boxes, text boxes, and graphics as embellishments for your collage.
- Save your collages within your BeFunky account AND save a copy of your collage in an alternative location.
- **DO NOT** save your collages as "Public" files on <http://www.befunky.com>.
- Email a copy of your collages to [sherman7@umd.edu](mailto:sherman7@umd.edu) **AT LEAST 48** hours prior to your interview date.

Appendix G: Preliminary Codes for Data Analysis

<u>Personal Factors</u>	<u>Background Experiences</u>	<u>Contextual Influences</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Race/ethnicity</li> <li>• Gender</li> <li>• Family composition</li> <li>• Family commitments</li> <li>• Work/life balance</li> <li>• Stress &amp; burnout</li> <li>• Parent and peer encouragement &amp; support</li> <li>• Proximity of home to school site</li> <li>• Socioeconomic status</li> <li>• Access to capital</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Career aspirations</li> <li>• High school experiences</li> <li>• Pre-service experiences</li> <li>• Teacher preparation</li> <li>• Student teaching practicum</li> <li>• Teacher role models</li> <li>• Motivating experiences</li> <li>• Professional development</li> <li>• Problem solving/ “satisficing”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student race/ethnicity</li> <li>• Student performance</li> <li>• Teacher performance</li> <li>• Availability of other job opportunities</li> <li>• Salary</li> <li>• School environment</li> <li>• Professional culture</li> <li>• Classroom management/student behavior</li> <li>• Support from administration</li> <li>• Mentoring and induction</li> <li>• Workload</li> <li>• Commitment to student success</li> <li>• School facilities</li> </ul>



Appendix H: IRB Consent Form

<b>Project Title</b>	NOVICE TEACHER PERSISTENCE: A COLLECTIVE CASE STUDY OF EARLY-CAREER AFRICAN-AMERICAN TEACHERS IN URBAN SETTINGS
<b>Purpose of the Study</b>	This research is being conducted by Dawn Sherman at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are an early-career African-American teacher who currently teaches in an urban school district. The purpose of this research project is to explore why early-career African-American teachers choose to remain in the profession after their first three years of teaching in urban school settings.
<b>Procedures</b>	The procedures involve the completion of three in-depth interviews in-person or via Skype, as well as the creation of two digital photo collages utilizing an online collaging software package.
<b>Potential Risks and Discomforts</b>	There are no perceived risks of participation in this study.
<b>Potential Benefits</b>	The benefits to you include the opportunity to reflect on the pre-teaching and in-service factors that encouraged you to enter and remain in the teaching profession, which can reenergize your motivation to teach. In addition, you will learn how to use online collaging software, a skill that can be directly transferred for use in your personal and professional lives. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of the many factors that influence early-career African-American teachers to enter and remain in urban classrooms.
<b>Confidentiality</b>	<p>Any potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized by storing data in a locked file and password-protected computer drive on the researcher's computer. All data will be deleted or destroyed one year after approval of the final dissertation.</p> <p>If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Pseudonyms will be used for all audio recordings, digital photo collages, transcripts, and researcher notes. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.</p>
<b>Compensation</b>	You will receive \$75 for your participation in this study. You will be responsible for any taxes assessed on the compensation. Only your name and address will be collected to receive compensation.

<p><b>Right to Withdraw and Questions</b></p>	<p>Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.</p> <p>If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigator:</p> <p><b>Dawn M. Sherman</b>  <b>4222 Fort Dupont Street SE</b>  <b>Washington, DC 20020</b>  <b>Tel: 240.988.1683</b>  <b>Email: <a href="mailto:sherman7@umd.edu">sherman7@umd.edu</a></b></p>	
<p><b>Participant Rights</b></p>	<p>If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>University of Maryland College Park</b>  <b>Institutional Review Board Office</b>  <b>1204 Marie Mount Hall</b>  <b>College Park, Maryland, 20742</b>  <b>E-mail: <a href="mailto:irb@umd.edu">irb@umd.edu</a></b>  <b>Telephone: 301-405-0678</b></p> <p>This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.</p>	
<p><b>Statement of Consent</b></p>	<p>Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.</p> <p>If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.</p>	
<p><b>Signature and Date</b></p>	<p><b>NAME OF PARTICIPANT</b>  <b>[Please Print]</b></p>	
	<p><b>SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT</b></p>	
	<p><b>DATE</b></p>	

# Appendix I: IRB Application

## University of Maryland College Park Institutional Review Board IRB Initial Application - Part 1

Last edited by: Dawn Sherman  
Last edited on: November 29, 2015  
[\[click for checklist\]](#)

Full  
 Expedited  
 Exempt

[425238-1] Novice teacher persistence: A collective case study of early-career African-American teachers in urban public schools

Answer all questions on this form completely, include attachments and obtain signatures of Co-Investigators and your department IRB Liaison prior to final submission on IRBNet.

### I. Principal Investigator

**Name:** Dawn Sherman                      **Status:** Graduate Student  
**Department:** TLPL- Teaching and Learning, Policy and Leadership  
**Phone:** 240-988-1883                      **Email:** sherman7@umd.edu  
**Address:** 4222 Fort Dupont Street SE, Washington, DC 20020

### II. Faculty Advisor

N/A

*Note:* A faculty advisor is required if the PI is a student resident or fellow and the Faculty Advisor MUST sign this package through IRBNet.

**Name:** Jennifer Turner  
**Department:** TLPL- Teaching and Learning, Policy and Leadership  
**Phone:** 301-405-0433                      **Email:** jdturner@umd.edu  
**Address:** 2233 Benjamin Building, College Park, MD 20742

### III. Co-Investigators

N/A

*Note:* All co-investigators MUST sign this package through IRBNet.

**Name:**  
**Department:**  
**Phone:**    **Email:**  
**Address:**

### IV. Funding Information

N/A

*Note:* A copy of the awarded grant application (minus budgetary information) must be provided.

Status	Funding Type	Sponsor Name	ORAA #	COI
--------	--------------	--------------	--------	-----

Funding Title:

#### V. Project Information

##### Lay Summary:

The purpose of the proposed study is to explore why novice African-American teachers choose to remain in the profession after their first three years of teaching in urban school settings. Through the lens of social cognitive career theory, I would like to explore novice African-American teachers' personal characteristics and background experiences which frame their pursuit of a teaching career, identify the contextual challenges and supports which had the greatest impact on their teaching self-efficacy and outcome expectations, and examine how these teachers mitigated apparent and perceived challenges to career persistence.

##### Requested Review Path:

- Full
- Expedited
- Exempt

Projected Completion Date: 11/15/2018

##### Research Category:

- Faculty or Staff Research
- Graduate Student Research
- Student/Faculty Collaboration
- Undergraduate Student Research
- Other:

##### Academic Committee Review:

- Yes - Masters committee
- Yes - Dissertation committee
- No additional academic review required

##### Participant Incentives:

- Cash
- Check
- Raffle/ Lottery:
  
- Extra Credit/ Course Credit:
  
- Gift:

- Food:
- Other:
- Not Applicable

#### VI. Performance Sites

##### Performance Sites Engaged in Human Subject Research: (where the research will be conducted)

- UMCP - Campus:
- University of Maryland - Extension:
- Campus Health Center
- Universities at Shady Grove:
- Schools:
- Prison/Jail:
- Other:

Participant interviews will be conducted at agreed-upon locations that are convenient for the researcher and participants.

Interview data and secondary data sources will be analyzed at the researcher's primary residence (4222 Fort Dupont Street SE, Washington, DC 20020).

##### Is this an international study?

- Yes [complete Section 10 of Initial Application Part 2]
- No

If yes: International Sites:

#### VII. Subject Information

##### Targeted Populations:

- Normal adult/healthy persons
- Cognitively impaired persons
- Economically disadvantaged persons
- Educationally disadvantaged persons
- Elderly/aged persons
- Hospital patients or outpatients
- Illiterate persons
- Individuals with physical disabilities

- Minority group(s)
- Minors/children  
*[inclusion of anyone under 18 requires a Parental Consent Form]*
- Non-English speakers
- Pregnant women
- Prisoners
- Students (non-minors)
- UMCP employees
- Other special characteristics and special populations:

**Informed Consent Process:**

- Informed consent will be obtained from subjects and documented with a signed, written consent form
- Informed consent will be obtained from subjects, but no signed consent form will be used. This includes oral consent and implied consent (e.g., completing a survey).  
*[please see the Requesting a Waiver of Informed Consent Guidance]*
- Fully informed consent will not be obtained from all subjects. This includes deception, withholding information, etc.  
*[please see the Requesting a Waiver of Informed Consent Guidance]*

**Will health information be collected?**

*(See the [HIPAA section of the IRB website](#) for more information and additional resources.)*

- No
- Yes, data are de-identified or constitute a limited data set.
- Yes, subject's authorization will be obtained or a waiver or alteration of authorization will be requested.  
*[complete IRB Form HIPAA]*

**VIII. Research Procedures**

**Research Procedures:**

- Records review - retrospective
- Records review - prospective
- Education research
- Behavioral experiments
- Behavioral observation
- Questionnaires/surveys
- Interviews
- Audiotaping/videotaping
- The Internet
- Deception  
*[describe debriefing process in Section 7 of Initial Application Part 2]*
- Cancer Interventions (health promotion, implementation, etc.)

- None of the above

**Biomedical Procedures:**

- Tissue banking
- Biopsy
- Blood draw
- Use of pre-existing tissues
- Clinical tests
- Radiology
- Radiation/X-ray/DEXA
- fMRI  
*[use IRB fMRI templates]*
- Pregnancy screening
- EKG
- EEG
- Genetic analysis
- None of the above

**IX. Assurances and Signatures**

**Assurances**

This research, once approved, is subject to continuing review and approval by the IRB. The principal investigator will maintain records of this research according to IRB guidelines. If these conditions are not met, approval of this research could be suspended or terminated.

**Electronic signatures certify that:**

- The signatory agrees that he or she is aware of the policies on research involving participants of the University of Maryland College Park and will safeguard the rights, dignity, and privacy of all participants.
- The information provided in this application form is correct.
- The principal investigator will seek and obtain prior written approval from the IRB for any substantive modification in the proposal, including but not limited to changes in cooperating investigators/agencies as well as changes in procedures.
- Unexpected or otherwise significant adverse events in the course of this study which may affect the risks and benefits to participation will be reported to the IRB.
- The research will not be initiated and subjects cannot be recruited until final written approval is granted.

**The following signatures are required for new project submissions:**

- Principal Investigator
- Research Advisor(s)
- IRB Liaison ([click here for list](#))

## INSTRUCTIONS TO RESEARCHERS

[\[top\]](#)

Now that you have completed this document, check your work, attach all appropriate documents, electronically sign and submit your work. Based on your responses, the following additional documentation must be included with this package before submission. Upload additional documentation in the Designer.

### Documents available in the IRBNet Forms and Templates Library:

- Consent Form (template and Completion Guide in Library)

### Additional required documentation:

No additional documents are required for this project.

If you have any questions, please refer to the guidelines in the IRBNet Forms and Templates Library or contact [irb@umd.edu](mailto:irb@umd.edu).



**UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND COLLEGE PARK**  
**Institutional Review Board**  
**Initial Application Part 2**

Last Rev 10/15/13

**1. Abstract:**

The purpose of the proposed study is to explore why novice African-American teachers choose to remain in the profession after their first three years of teaching in urban school settings. Through the lens of social cognitive career theory (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994, 2000, 2002), I would like to explore novice African-American teachers' personal characteristics and background experiences which frame their pursuit of a teaching career, identify the contextual challenges and supports which had the greatest impact on their teaching self-efficacy and outcome expectations, and examine how these teachers mitigated apparent and perceived challenges to career persistence.

A qualitative collective case study design (Stake, 2005; 2006) will be used to gain a deeper understanding of how novice African-American teachers' personal characteristics, background experiences, and contextual factors proximal to teaching shape their career self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and persistence in urban schools. This study aims to add the novice African-American teacher voice to existing research on urban teacher retention and provide a better understanding of their unique needs. The findings of this study can be used to develop targeted teacher training, recruitment and induction initiatives designed to increase the number of African-American teachers who eventually enter and sustain the urban teaching workforce.

The identities of study participants will be kept confidential at all times. Pseudonyms will be used for all audio recordings, transcripts, and notes. No names will be used in the reporting of study findings. Preliminary screening survey data, audio recordings, interview transcripts, and notes will be secured in a locked file and compiled electronically onto a password-protected hard drive.

**2. Subject Selection:**

- a. **Recruitment:** Teachers will be recruited through informal social networking websites such as Facebook and LinkedIn by creating posts in groups that target African-American education professionals. Interested teachers would be asked to complete an online pre-screening questionnaire to determine if the teacher would be a viable candidate for the study.
- b. **Eligibility Criteria:** Any teacher currently working in a public elementary school located in an urban school district who identifies as Black or African-American, chose teaching as their first career after college graduation, has between three years and five years of professional teaching experience exclusively in urban settings, and intends to remain in the teaching profession after the current school year is eligible to participate in the study.
- c. **Rationale:** The focus of this study is the novice African-American teacher persistence in urban settings. As such, all participants exhibit the above characteristics so that they would be an eligible candidate for a case study of the proposed phenomenon.
- d. **Enrollment Numbers:** Three teachers will be enrolled in the study – one first-year teacher, one second-year teacher, and one third-year teacher).

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- e. **Rationale for Enrollment Numbers:** Multiple case study (Stake, 2005, 2006) will be used as the methodology for the present study. The number of cases cited above is consistent with the recommended number of cases in multiple case study research. The use of three subjects allows the researcher to obtain a breadth of data from different years of novice teaching experience while providing a depth of data for each individual subject.

**3. Procedures:**

Each subject will participate in three in-person or Skype interviews, each interview lasting a total of 90 minutes. During the interview, the researcher will ask open-ended questions about the subject's teaching experiences in urban schools and the contextual factors that influence their choice to persist in the field. In addition, participants will be asked to create two digital photo collages using an online collaging tool: one collage of pictures representing factors that influenced their decision to enter the teaching profession and another collage of pictures representing factors that contribute to their persistence in the field. Each collage will include at least five pictures of the participant's choosing. The opening period of the second and third interviews will allow time for the researcher to ask questions about the photographs selected for the corresponding collage and for the teacher to provide additional background about each of the pictures used for the collage.

**4. Risks:**

There are no perceived risks of participation in this study.

**5. Benefits:**

There are some direct benefits to teachers who participate in all sections of the study. Through the interview and collaging processes, participants will have an opportunity to reflect on the teaching and learning experiences that encouraged them to enter and remain in the teaching profession. Their participation may invigorate their desire to remain in the profession based on their original and current motivations to teach. In addition, they will learn how to use online collaging software, a skill that can be directly transferred for use in their personal and professional lives.

**6. Confidentiality:**

The identities of study participants will be kept confidential at all times. Pseudonyms will be used for all audio recordings, digital photo collages, transcripts, and notes. No names will be used in the reporting of study findings. Preliminary screening survey data, digital collages, audio recordings, interview transcripts, and other data will be secured in a locked file and compiled electronically onto a password-protected hard drive on the researcher's personal computer. All data will be deleted or destroyed one year after approval of the final dissertation.

**7. Consent Process:**

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Consent forms will be provided to all participants for signature prior to participation in the study. All participants will receive a copy of the consent form for their records. Participants can decline to participate in the study at any time.

**8. Conflict of Interest:**

There are no conflicts of interest for the researcher in this study.

**9. HIPAA Compliance:**

No protected health information will be used in this study.

**10. Research Outside of the United States:**

Not applicable

**11. Research Involving Prisoners:**

Not applicable

**12. SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS**

Your Initial Application must include a completed **Initial Application Part 1 (On-Line Document)**, the information required in items 1-11 above, and all relevant supporting documents including: consent forms, letters sent to recruit participants, questionnaires completed by participants, and any other material that will be presented, viewed or read to human subject participants.

For funded research, a copy of the Awarded Grant Application (minus the budgetary information) must be uploaded. If the Grant has not been awarded at the time of submission of this Initial Application, a statement must be added to the Abstract Section stating that an Addendum will be submitted to include the Grant Application once it has been awarded.

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**THE IRB OFFICE WILL NO LONGER STAMP CONSENT FORMS. THE CONSENT FORMS IN YOUR APPROVED IRBNET PACKET MUST BE USED. THESE ARE YOUR APPROVED CONSENT FORMS.**

Appendix I: Timeline (adapted from Marshall & Rossman, 2006)

Activity	Dec 2015	Jan 2016	Feb 2016	Mar 2016	Apr 2016	May 2016	June 2016	July 2016	Aug 2016	Sept 2016	Oct 2016	Nov 2016
IRB submission and approval	■	■										
Solicitation of potential participants			■	■								
Pre-screening of potential participants			■	■								
Formal data collection					■	■	■					
Transcribing and summarizing data					■	■	■					
Writing analytic memos for each case					■	■	■					
Member-checking case studies							■	■	■			
Preparing cross-case analyses								■	■			
Preparing draft dissertation for review									■	■	■	
Committee review of final dissertation											■	■
Final dissertation defense												■

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