

# Phenomenology of the Urban Teacher

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## ABSTRACT

The average teacher tenure in urban school districts is 3-5 years. Short tenure is often due to lack of teacher effectiveness, lack of teacher quality, over placement in underperforming schools, and deficit influences. Urban schools and school districts with large percentages of students of color, foster youth and English Learners must sustain quality teachers.

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

Understanding the essential experiences that sustains quality teachers in an urban school district is critical for the success of students in District A. The implications are significant in that urban schools typically are unable to build experienced teacher core that leads to equal distribution of quality teachers (Ingersoll, 2003). Early trend data in District A supports the need for this issue be explored immediately.

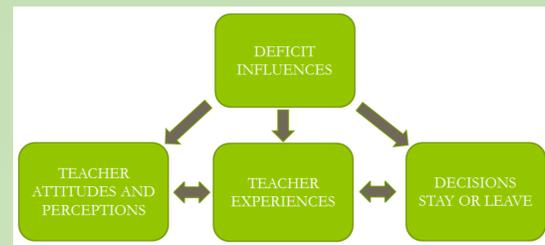
## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The attrition of new and experienced teachers is a great challenge for schools and administrators throughout the United States, particularly in large urban districts (Buckley, Schneider, & Shang, 2004). It is imperative that urban districts understand common threads of experiences that influence a teacher's decision to remain in or exit a school district. Research suggests that human capital is a factor that can affect teachers' retention (Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton, & Freitas, 2010).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

- Deficit ideologies are deeply rooted in aspects of American society and its socializing institutions (Gorski, 2010)
- Deficit thinking is directly associated with school failure (Valencia, 2012)
- Teacher effectiveness and efficacy emerge as major themes in recruitment and retention of teachers in inner city schools (Yost, 2006).
- Teachers play an integral role in the ecology of the classroom and it is important that we understand their careers (Henninger, 2007)
- Empirical literature in teacher turnover reveal; understanding employee turnover is consistent with that more teachers seize the opportunity to leave difficult working conditions to move to more appealing environments (Lankford, Loeb & Wyckoff, 2002)

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK



**Deficit ideology** is a worldview that explains and justifies outcome inequalities- standardized test scores or levels of educational attainment, for example- by pointing to supposed deficiencies within disenfranchised individuals and communities (Brandon, 2003; Gorski, 2008; Valencia, 1997; Weiner, 2003; Yosso, 2005).

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How "urban teacher" (experiences) attitudes, and perceptions towards the District(Site) leadership affect retention in District A?

What factors influence a teacher's decision to leave or remain in a school District?

How does their relationship with their Principal influence their attitudes and beliefs about school culture?

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## METHODOLOGY

**Phenomenology** was the methodology used for this study. The researcher studied the phenomenon of the "urban teacher", experienced teachers in the District A. A purposeful sample of participants was developed based on the following criteria: (a) teachers from elementary schools; (b) teachers who participated in teacher networks and other district professional development opportunities; (c) teachers who were recognized as satisfactory as evidenced by the fact that they had no unsatisfactory evaluations or discipline issues within the last 5 years; (d) teachers who were recognized by their principals as exemplary, as evidenced by overall student performance; and teachers who have worked in the district for a minimum of 5 years. In person interviews and observations were conducted for this study. Part of the study occurred within the individual participant's classroom in District A.



## FINDINGS

### THEMES

**Drawn into the profession** includes meaning units of service advocacy, and mentorship

**Administrator-teacher positive relationships** includes meaning units of communication, respect, and validation

**Cohesive staff and school communities** includes meaning units of whole child focus, interaction, resources and relationships

**Dedication to students** includes meaning units of commitment, resilience, sensitivity and high expectations

**Effects of trauma and negative influences** includes meaning units of limited resources, low skills, negative perceptions, urban violence and low expectations

**Motivation for remaining** includes meaning units of student development, autonomy, need, responsibility and diversity

### IMPLICATIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS for FURTHER STUDY

Five elementary teachers were involved in this study. This study could be replicated with an increase in numbers to compare findings.

The lives of elementary teachers were examined through personal interviews and observations, the experiences and other associated staff such as administration (site and district) could be included allowing for triangulation of the data.

This study could be replicated at the middle and high school levels to compare findings

The participants of this study were classified as middle age, forty five and above. A study on Generation X and Y teachers could be replicated to compare findings.

A longitudinal study of the participants involved in this research could be done to learn how teachers attitudes, perceptions and beliefs towards their experiences continue.

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