

## “This Community is Home for Me”: Retaining Highly Qualified Teachers in Marginalized School Communities

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### Abstract

There are significant inconsistencies in the levels of preparation of teachers placed in high-need urban schools and those placed in suburban, middle-class schools. In this qualitative research study, I surveyed, interviewed, and observed three highly qualified teachers and one principal from an urban-intensive, high-need school community. Findings revealed that these highly qualified teachers stayed in a marginalized school community for four overarching reasons: (1) They appreciated their working conditions and building leaders; (2) they engaged in continuous professional learning; (3) they forged meaningful relationships; and (4) they were placed in their community of choice.

*Keywords:* marginalized school community; highly qualified teachers; urban; minoritized; retention

*Energetic, enthusiastic, and full of zeal, Megan (all names of people and places are pseudonyms) begins interviewing for 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teaching positions. Having completed practicum requirements and teacher preparation programming at Franklin University and having earned initial licensure, she feels extremely competent and confident in her job search. Yet, four interviews without a job offer begins to strain Megan's confidence. She reaches out to her academic advisor for guidance and encouragement. The advisor informs Megan that first-year teachers have a harder time landing positions in school districts with historically strong teacher retention and encourages her to broaden the search by applying to elementary schools in urban communities where there is far less teacher retention, which means the probability of securing a position as a first-year teacher is greater.*

*After receiving two offers from three urban schools and none from ongoing pursuits in suburban schools, Megan chooses the school where she feels well-received by teachers and*

*administrators. As the school year begins, she feels connected to her students and is excited to help them grow and develop as learners. However, it is not long before Megan comes to realize that love for teaching is not enough to sustain her.*

*Deep down inside, Megan is becoming more and more disturbed by the fact that the majority of her students are struggling readers; in fact, they were significantly behind the students with whom she did her student teaching. Her students are not showing gains and she doesn't know what to do. Additionally, Megan is disturbed by behavior problems of some students that negatively affect other students' safety and learning. None of these issues ever surfaced in Megan's teacher prep or practicum experiences, and the enormity of it all begins to feel suffocating.*

*Each morning Megan's heart sinks a little further as she heads to school not only because of the constraining factors within the building and the lack of support from school administrators that make teaching so hard, but also because of the impoverished neighborhood she travels through that houses her school. She is shamefully relieved to leave this neighborhood as she returns to her affluent suburb each afternoon and wonders how much longer she can keep doing this. Megan is similar to other novice teachers who end up in marginalized school communities because of mere happenstance and not by desire.*

Minoritized and poor students in marginalized school communities are disproportionately assigned to uncredentialed, inexperienced, least prepared, underqualified, and the weakest academic performing teachers (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Brill & McCartney, 2008; Loeb et al., 2012; Murnane & Steele, 2007; Shores et al., 2020). Historically, this has been the experience of minoritized students because their teachers transfer from their marginalized school communities to schools that serve wealthier non-minoritized populations (Rice, 2010). According to Simon

and Johnson (2015), “teachers systematically favor higher-achieving, non-minority, non-low-income students” (p. 1). Within the last 30 years, teacher turnover has increased substantially in schools in the United States, and historically underserved marginalized communities’ turnover rates have been even more significant than other communities (Marinell & Coca, 2013; Ronfeldt et al., 2013; Simon & Johnson, 2015). The teaching profession is a revolving door through which many novice teachers exit because of job discontentment, and the teacher retention dilemma in the United States is most acute in urban and rural schools. This high retention rate costs schools billions of dollars (Ingersoll, 2003; Phillips, 2015). Because of the mass exodus of quality teachers from marginalized school communities, minoritized students are deprived of opportunities to receive the education they deserve (Ronfeldt et al., 2013).

Children are less likely to succeed unless they are provided with teachers who are competent in their content knowledge and skillful in their pedagogy (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Darling-Hammond & Berry, 2006). Nevertheless, research has revealed that there is a significant disparity in the distribution and instability of effective teachers in schools, and this might be the most urgent problem facing American education (Berry, 2004; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Jacob, 2007; Ronfeldt, et al., 2013). Furthermore, numerous studies have revealed that across the United States there is an increasing teaching-quality gap between the low-income and high-income school communities (Brill & McCartney, 2008; Brill & McCartney, 2008; Darling-Hammond & Berry, 2006; Fisher-Ari et al.; Loeb et al., 2012; Ronfeldt et al., 2013).

The evidence reveals mounting teacher attrition in disadvantaged school communities; however, what about a focus on why highly qualified teachers *remain* in marginalized school communities? What might we learn about retaining skilled teachers in high need communities

from those who persist? Hence, the purpose of this article is to explore the following research question: Why do some highly qualified teachers remain teachers in marginalized school communities? To answer, I engaged in a qualitative case study of three highly qualified teachers and one school principal, all of whom worked a high-needs charter school community for at least eight years. Before introducing my participants, I offer a review of literature to help situate the urgency of my research question.

### **Literature Review**

There has been a longstanding practice of assigning disproportionately low-income children in marginalized school communities to teachers who have the least preparation and the weakest academic backgrounds (Brill & McCartney, 2008; Murnane & Steele, 2007). This systemic practice must be disrupted in order to give our young students in marginalized school communities access to high quality teaching and effective processes. For this, there must be an adequate supply of competent individuals who are willing and able to serve as teachers (Guarino et al., 2006). Berry (2004) argued that “substantial policy changes at the local, state, and federal levels are required to recruit and retain high-quality teachers for all schools, and especially in those serving more challenging students” (p. 6). Darling-Hammond (2003) posited that unless policies are developed to curtail attrition through better preparation and assignment, the goal of ensuring qualified teachers for all students will remain in jeopardy.

An infusion of highly skilled teachers in high needs schools can work to promote educational equity (Brill & McCartney, 2008; Jacob, 2007; Loeb & Béteille, 2012; Murnane & Steele, 2007; Young, 2018). An equitable education system helps offer opportunities to all students to advance the knowledge and skills needed to develop into engaged and productive citizens. Because all people are created equal, all people regardless of their gender, socio-

economic status, race or religion must have equal opportunities to receive a high-quality education from experienced, effective, and qualified teachers. As Darling-Hammond (2003) attested, “In all schools, regardless of school wealth, student demographics, or staffing patterns, the most important resource for continuing improvement is the knowledge and skill of the school’s best prepared and most committed teachers” (p. 5). Even though this is a poignant acknowledgement, “Very few research studies exist...that combine issues of recruitment and retention with the issue of teacher quality” (Guarino et al., 2006, p. 176).

In this study, schools in marginalized communities refer to schools in low socio-economic neighborhoods where the poverty rate is 80% to 100% as determined by free or reduced lunch qualification based on parents’ salaries (Milner, 2012). Researchers (Brill & McCartney, 2008; Shores et al., 2020) reveal that the more impoverished and racially isolated the school, the greater likelihood that these students will be taught by inexperienced and uncertified teachers. This has been the practice in marginalized communities.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study of the retention of highly qualified teachers in marginalized school communities was grounded in Ladson-Billings’s and Tate’s Critical Race Theory (1995). This theory was chosen because of its underpinnings in equitable education for minoritized students and their dynamic impact on retaining high quality teachers. For the purpose of this study, *marginalized* school communities are defined as highly impoverished/poor communities where the poverty rate is 90% or higher. Additionally, *minoritized* students are students who are classified as other than White students.

Gloria Ladson-Billings’s and Tate’s Critical Race Theory (1995) was chosen for this study because it focuses on the argument that race in minoritized communities remain

unaccredited in education, resulting in a perpetuation of unequal opportunity in education. The notion of unequal opportunity is associated with the idea that minoritized students should have access to the same educational opportunities as their counterparts. According to Solorzano and Yosso (2001) “critical race theory challenges the dominant discourses on race ... as it relates to education by examining how educational theory and practice are used to subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups” (as cited in Milner, 2007, p. 2). Ladson-Billings (1995) iterated that “the voice component of critical race theory provides a way to communicate the experience and realities of the oppressed—students in minoritized school communities” (p. 58). Critical Race Theory (CRT) substantiates that knowledge can and should be generated through narratives and counter-narratives (Milner, 2007). Thus, retaining highly qualified teachers in marginalized communities requires teachers to become great listeners in their schools. Through such listening, these highly qualified teachers will become increasingly culturally aware of students in their school communities.

Ladson-Billings further emphasized that CRT suggests current instructional strategies presume minoritized students are deficient; therefore, classroom teachers are engaged in instructional approaches casted in a language of failure that involves some aspect of remediation. This theory demands equity in education for all students and excellence from educators who are placed in front of minoritized students. Thus, CRT scholars unabashedly reject a paradigm that attempts to be everything to everyone and consequently becomes nothing for anyone, allowing the status quo to prevail (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

### **Methodology**

This qualitative case study approach helped to foreground factors that influence the retention of highly qualified teachers in marginalized school communities. The focus was placed

on listening and examining the rationales of three teachers and one principal regarding their educative space (i.e., their school). Even though the school setting was similar for all participants, each person had her particular perceptions and each participant responded to questions based on her personal experiences. For this study, data collection included informal interviews, participant observations, surveys and a focus group interview. The study was conducted over the course of two months in a low-income marginalized school community located in an urban-intensive area in the northeastern United States. (Milner, 2012).

## **Method**

### **Positionality: Personal Experience**

As a Black educator who immigrated to the United States from the Caribbean, I was taught that attaining a good education is the key to a successful future. As a result, I have worked arduously as a classroom teacher and an administrator to ensure that my students receive a good quality education on a daily basis. I have worked in public school education for over two decades in different types of schools, including marginalized school communities, and I have had myriad roles, including teacher, teacher leader, and administrator. As a result, I am cognizant of the teacher-quality disparity that exists in marginalized school communities. Based on my experiences, the majority of the teachers who are identified as highly qualified and who work in marginalized school communities typically transfer to wealthier districts within three years. Thus, my experiences confirm what the literature indicates: (a) New, inexperienced, and academically low-performing teachers accept teaching positions in urban schools, (b) effective

teachers transfer to wealthier districts to continue/prolong their teaching careers (Johnson, 2012; Rice, 2010). Historically, the students in marginalized schools suffer academically because the teachers who are highly qualified do not remain in their school community.

### **Participants**

The participants are educators currently teaching at Teacher Career Pathways, a charter school in an urban area in the northeastern United States. In addition to interviewing the principal of Teacher Career Pathways, I recruited three teachers who are classified as “highly qualified” based on the school’s teacher evaluation rubric. The teachers have been teaching in this low-income marginalized charter school community for approximately 8 to 10 years. All the participants identify as female. Ms. Ya identifies as a Black American who has been teaching at the school for 8 years. She is originally from the Northeast, and she currently teaches at the kindergarten level. Ms. We identifies as White. She is originally from the Midwest. She has been teaching at the school for 8 years and currently teaches at the fourth-grade level. Ms. Da identifies as Latina who is originally from the Northeast, and she is a proud member of the community in which she serves as a third-grade teacher.

The principal, Ms. Mer, originally was a classroom teacher in the school of focus. After eight years as a teacher, she transitioned into the role of principal. Ms. Mer identifies as White. She is originally from Midwest. She deems it an honor to serve the students in her school community, and she considers herself to be a change agent who does not want to perpetuate systemic inequities in education.

At the onset of this study, I engaged in purposive sampling. In so doing, I relied on my knowledge and judgment as a pedagogue and an administrator when soliciting the participants. As a result, an Agreement to Participate/Consent Letter was sent to educators of a particular



charter school. It is important to note that I am not a member of this particular school community.

## **Data Collection**

### ***Survey***

After receiving the signed consent from the educators, a survey comprised of 10 multiple-choice questions was emailed to each of the participants (teachers and principal) for completion (please see Appendix A). Upon the receipt of the completed survey, I followed-up to schedule an interview with each participant.

### ***Interviews***

A semi-structured interview protocol (please see Appendix B) guided the virtual interviews that took place via the Zoom videoconference platform. Each interview session lasted approximately 45 minutes. Each session was recorded and transcribed using the Otter transcription tool.

### ***Observations***

An observation protocol (Please see Appendix C) supported classroom observations, and I shared this protocol with the teachers in advance of visiting their classrooms virtually. Each teacher shared her Zoom link and entertained a visit to her classroom at a mutually agreed-upon time. Two teachers (Ms. We and Ms. Da) taught mathematics, while the remaining teacher, Ms. Da, taught literacy. Each classroom observation lasted between 20 to 30 minutes.

### ***Focus Group Interview***

A focus group protocol (Please see Appendix D) was developed and shared with the four participants preceding the Focus Group Interview. This 35-minute group interview also was conducted via Zoom.

### **Data Analysis**

Subsequent to the individual interviews and the focus group interview, I perused and edited the transcripts that were generated via the utilization of the Otter.ai – Audio Transcription Tool to ensure accuracy of recorded conversations. At first, open coding was conducted. Using single words and short sequences of words to generate concepts, 23 initial codes were generated. As the coding process ensued, I transitioned into axial coding. Axial coding involved combining several open codes. At this point, I was able to reduce the number of codes to 10 categories. Ultimately, using selective coding (combining open or axial codes across interviews), four themes emerged to concretize the focus of the study. The four major themes include (a) working conditions-building leadership, (b) professional learning, (c) relationships forged, and (d) community of choice.

<Insert Figure 1 about here>

### **Findings**

The findings of this study revealed that not all highly qualified teacher leave “poor” school communities. Instead, the findings explain why some highly qualified teachers remain teachers in marginalized school communities.

#### **Working Conditions and Building Leadership**

Across the three interviews with teachers, working conditions was one of the factors that permeated the conversations. Working conditions played a major role in these teachers’ decisions to remain in their school. Teachers spoke frequently about teamwork and the

opportunities to engage in collaborative work that had been integrated in their schedules. Ms. Ya shared, “Our school has a great team. We have a focus on team – the belief is that we go further together. Once we make decisions, we all stick to it.” Relatedly, effective communication was paramount in their decision to remain at Teacher Career Pathways, a low-income marginalized school community. For instance, Ms. Da mentioned, “The weekly teacher intellectual meetings have helped me to develop into a highly qualified teacher. In these meetings, this is where minds come together to discuss practices.” Moreover, the teachers disclosed that the leaders are good listeners, which empowers the teachers to have a voice in decision making. Ms. Da shared:

The principal and the network ensure that great teachers remain in the classroom or at our school by making sure like they’re listening, they ask for feedback. It gives us voice, a sense of a voice to be heard, to be responded to. And then actions are taken based on the feedback that’s given. I feel like I am in a place where I know I can share my thinking. I know that at least I am being listened to, it’s being heard.

Similarly, Ms. We emphasized that “leadership asks for input from the staff about their practice, as well as just thinking about where we want our school to be. It feels like a collaborative effort between staff and leaders.”

Additionally, school culture pervaded the conversations held with the teachers. All the teachers mentioned that being a member of a positive school culture was important to them. Ms. We shared, “I believe there are just a lot of strong relationships in the building. I live far away from my family, but I get to see and work with my best friends. I enjoy who I work with.” To add, Ms. Ya commented, “My team is solution oriented. We come up with solutions when problems arise within the workspace. How can you solve it? How can you fix it? I think that’s powerful.” Further, Ms. Da communicated, “In this school, I feel like I’m a part of a community.

I think of this as my second home because my colleagues become my second family.” All the participants spoke about the importance of placing focus on adult culture. The teachers applauded the principal for paying keen attention to the culture of the school for teachers. Ms. Ya attested, “I think it is important to focus on the adult culture because that does tie into why teams are effective. It is the belief of our school that if we adults are united; then, the student culture can be great.”

Throughout the interviews, the teachers confirmed that as a result of the positive adult culture that has been cultivated, they trust their principals and their peers, which also helped them to remain at Teacher Career Pathways. Ms. We acknowledged, “We work hard here and would be able to do that without the support of one another. Highly qualified teachers stay where they can be open with each other – a place where they’re happy.”

Teacher support by the principal was also reiterated during the interviews. Ms. Ya proclaimed, “I stay in this school because I am supported and every year I’m getting better since I started. I’ve seen growth in me and that makes me want to stay here.” Furthermore, because of the trust that leadership has for the staff, the teachers are trusted to make certain moves. For example, Ms. We indicated, “I know and believe that our leadership team trusts me to do what I believe is right for our kids, and curriculum. I am very grateful that my coach and principal have a strong sense of trust in me.”

The teachers felt that they received support to strengthen their practice. The teacher participants expressed a love for their school where support is overt. As Ms. Da revealed, “I know my learning style and I was not learning in my other school in a big group. However, in this school, there’s an opportunity to continue to learn and just develop in my craft.”

### ***Professional Learning***

Every teacher and the principal iterated that professional learning is the main pillar of their school. All the teachers stated that professional learning is one of the pertinent reasons they have remained in this school 8 or more years. The importance of professional development is embedded in all aspects of the culture, even in the Teacher Career Pathways Program. Once a teacher attains the highest level of teaching in this Charter Network (Level 5), she is awarded a substantial increase in salary, as well as a professional development budget. In so doing, these teachers have myriad opportunities to engage in professional development. The principal informed me, “The school provides additional professional development opportunities free of cost.” Furthermore, in each interview, the teacher revealed that once or twice per week, an instructional coach visits their classroom to observe their pedagogical practice and give explicit feedback about their practice. Ms. We revealed, “Coaching and observations – I find them really exciting. Regardless of how many years you’ve been teaching, there’s always room for improvement and the culture of coaching and observation is just so normal that it’s not as scary as it sounds.” The principal also shared that she believed teacher retention was related to consistent professional development. She explained, “As an organization, we are committed to teacher development, specifically teacher feedback.” Through the individual interviews, the teachers revealed that the enhancement of their pedagogical practice occurs in three specific ways. First, all staff members are observed weekly by instructional coaches and the principal is observed by her regional superintendent. Second, after the weekly visits, intentional debriefing meetings convene to discuss the lesson or meeting that was observed. Third, every Friday professional learning sessions ensue. The focus of each professional development is based on the most common pedagogical need that is recommended by the Dean/Instructional Coach.

Additionally, every Wednesday, grade teams across the school had an opportunity to engage in lesson studies. Each team collaborated to discuss mathematics and read plans for the following week. In so doing, the content, aligning standards, and student outcomes were made apparent for all educators.

Furthermore, the professional development was delivered to the entire teacher team on a weekly basis. The principal informed me, “We meet as a leadership team twice a week and one of those meetings is about how to spend our time during the weekly professional development.” The foci of the professional learning sessions are determined by the principal and the deans based on the trends that are observed throughout the school week. In this charter school, the professional learning sessions occur every Friday afternoon. The school day ends for the students at 1:00 p.m., but from 1:30 p.m. until 4:00 p.m., the teachers participate in the weekly focused professional development. As per the principal, “We really use those meetings as an opportunity to build content knowledge for our teachers.” The weekly Friday professional development sessions are facilitated by the coaches who focus on the main area(s) of deficiencies that became unearthed during their observations throughout the week.

### ***Relationships Forged***

Relationships forged with students and their families was a poignant factor explaining why the highly qualified teachers remained in their school. These teachers were genuinely interested and invested in their students. Ms. We passionately shared, “I’m here because it is a special place. You build a relationship with your kids and then their families.” Students and their families seem to be significantly important to the teachers. They seem to genuinely care about the children’s wellbeing. Ms. Da confirmed, “The families keep me here at this school. I get to teach different siblings over the years and I can even ask my former students to help their

siblings with the content.” Ms. Ya revealed, “I remain at this school because of the children. It’s more than just saying good morning to a child. It’s actually getting to know your students.” Ms. We added, “This community is home for me. I believe we have a really strong community with the staff and with their families. I want to continue the work to support scholars and their learning.” The premise is that once a relationship is developed with a child, it is easier to home in on the student with deep knowledge of the child and his/her community.

These teachers spoke highly about the strong and meaningful relationships that had been forged within their school community. Ms. We affirmed, “Oftentimes I have become very close friends with the leadership team. Personally, I feel very comfortable that I could go to my leadership with any professional or personal problem or question.” Furthermore, when the teachers spoke about their students, they exuded love for them. Ms. We stated, “You have to genuinely care and love the students. I think I remain in this school because of the relationships I have with my students. It’s not just knowing the content. There’s so much between knowing the content.” Ms. Ya reflected, “I carve out special times for my students. During this time, I learn about what they like and dislike, as well as their home life. Then, I start building relationships with their parents.” Teachers expressed that they have created loving relationships where they can have transparent conversations with parents. Ms. Da disclosed, “I can be open with my families by telling them that their children are not meeting the expectations and throw that right back to academics. It’s not like I’m not here to help. Utilize me how you like.”

The teachers and their principal recalled that respect for teachers is one of the priority foci in their school community. The principal explained, “In our Charter Network, we strive to retain highly qualified teachers in the classroom, so the Deans, who are equivalent to Assistant Principals in public schools, and our stage 5 teachers’ salaries are the same. The reason we do

this is because we believe in life-long teachers and we don't want our teachers who remain in the classroom to feel as if they are at a disadvantage." Therefore, in this school, emphasis is placed on teacher value and respect.

Respect is also given to the teachers by way of an organizational health survey. The principal acknowledged, "This survey is issued twice per year--every staff member anonymously shares feedback on the school, around the functioning of the school. These surveys are another medium where we get feedback on teachers' feelings about working at the school." Based on the teachers' responses during their interviews, this overt respect is much appreciated. Ms. We affirmed, "One thing I truly love and appreciate about our school and I share with new members is that you grow and grow every single year and that leadership asks for input from the staff."

Collaboration among staff also resounded during the interviews. Teachers shared the importance of being in a school where there is a community of learners: Everyone is on the same page and teachers are respected by their peers. As a result, teachers are happy to come to work. Ms. Ya emphasized, "I think what unites teams is when you have minds that are willing to look at the big picture and figure out the best way we can solve matters, instead of ignoring situations." This sentiment also resounded in Ms. Da's response, "We respect each other's thoughts during collaboration and we put all our minds together like I choose not to go to another place." In essence, there seems to be a formula generated from the interviews, which is: respect + time spent with students = love.

Finally, the interaction with families and the empowerment of families is important as well. The teachers shared that because their school community places much effort on being reflective, getting to know the families and what they value is of significant importance to them. Ms. We highlighted, "I like the way our school is pushing for the power of voices from families



and kids. Most of our teachers don't live in the community, including me, but I am learning about the community." She also shared that the staff members are learning and working with the children and their families rather than telling them what to do.

### ***Community of Choice***

Each highly qualified teacher in this study disclosed that they remain at Teacher Career Pathways because they made an intentional decision to teach in this marginalized school community. Ms. Ya shared, "I desire to educate our youth, especially in low socio-economic communities because I notice that they are treated unfairly. The education standards are not the same as they are in wealthier communities." She also shared that the focus of urban schools is usually data, but the focus should be more than data, there should be a keen interest in shaping the whole child. It is her belief that her school sets out to teach the whole child and that is very important to her.

Ms. We repeatedly emphasized, "This community is a special place. I was drawn to working in an urban setting or the marginalized communities. I just thought these communities needed good teachers, so that's where I wanted to teach." She further shared that she actually left this community and returned to a school in the Midwest, but returned soon after because she missed the diversity that she experienced at this marginalized school community. Ms. We told me that her experience was unique because her parents were in the military and she grew up in Japan. She then speculated, "As I think back of like why did I have this desire or pull to work in marginalized communities, maybe, you know I grew up in a diverse setting when I lived outside of Tokyo."

Ms. Da feels that children should have access to teachers who look just like them. She asserted, "This community reflects me and who I am. I like being a member of this community

because different cultures are here. It's like we're actually representing what the world looks like." She further explained, "Being a role model is important because our communities don't have all those positive role models that kids can look up to."

All the teachers revealed that their desire is to provide a good quality education to the students in this diverse, low-income marginalized urban school community. The teachers were cognizant of the students' needs and willing to invest time and hard work to make certain that students receive the education they need and deserve to compete successfully domestically and globally.

### **Discussion**

The challenge of retaining highly qualified teachers in marginalized school communities is not a new phenomenon. This has been an egregious issue since the 1980s (Wronowski, 2017). Marginalized school communities historically have served minoritized students, and these pupils tend to lose the teachers who produce the highest levels of student achievement (The New Teacher Project, 2012; Wronowski, 2017). Seemingly, some effective teachers accept offers to teach in these school communities; however, research reveals that a significant percentage of these teachers do not remain in their schools after five years due to difficult working conditions in urban schools (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Hughes et al., 2015; The New Teacher Project, 2012).

CRT helps to call attention to ongoing practices in minoritized school communities that and the related disparity in outcomes based on race and education. These disparities can be seen in assignments in schools, and access to enriched curriculum. Furthermore, CRT homes in on the

fight to equalize school resources. As a result, during this study, I probed deeply to glean from experienced highly qualified teachers why they remain in a school that is located in a poor, urban community (Milner, 2012). As noted in Figure 2, a CRT framework also helps to emphasize the ways in which the retention of highly qualified teachers can support equity in education. More specifically, as the cyclical figure suggests, the four categories—working conditions and building leadership, professional learning, relationships, and intentionality—not only contribute to retention, but also support the *continued* retention of highly qualified teachers, which can translate into greater opportunities for equitable education.

<insert Figure 2 around here>

The growth mindset (Dweck, 2015) connoted that one has not reached their fullest potential yet; nevertheless, there is a consistent push for all teachers to be their best. As a result, there is an accountability system in place, where teachers are evaluated yearly by the Teacher Career Pathways via surveys by their students, peers, and parents. This accountability structure raises the bar to excellence for all. The teacher is evaluated based on their interactions with all stakeholders.

The teachers in this study emphasized that they have remained in this low-income marginalized school because they love the working conditions of their school. A CRT lens calls attention to how minoritized students are even more segregated now than in prior years. For instance, most of these students attend schools in urban communities as is obvious in this study. Nevertheless, the teachers acknowledged that they have ample opportunities to engage in peer collaboration. Their school leaders listened to their suggestions and they felt as if their voices mattered. Additionally, the participants appreciated a focus on creating a positive culture for adults; in so doing, the students will likely in turn experience greater positivity from their

teachers. Finally, the teachers felt that their school environment was a place where they could be open and transparent; they trusted their peers and their administrators

The teachers all appreciated the professional development that was provided weekly. They appreciated the one-to-one coaching sessions, the grade-band planning time, and the whole school professional development sessions on Fridays. Throughout the study, teachers noted that the consistent feedback, training, coaching, and support from peers and leaders positively had impacted their professional growth.

The teachers also disclosed that they had chosen to remain in their school due to the relationships they had developed and maintained with the students and their families. They acknowledged that when a relationship was forged with students and their families, teaching and learning were more attainable. According to Ms. Da, when you know your students, you are able to better plan for their success. More than anything else, the love and the respect they felt in this educative space contributed to their retention.

Finally, the teachers divulged that they were willing to be recruited for and remained in this school community because this was the type of environment that they wanted to serve. CRT calls attention to the significant disparities that are present between the schooling experience of White middle-class students, and those of poor African-American and Latino students. All participants were proud to be connected to students from a low-income marginalized school community. The teachers were desirous of working in a diverse community because they believe that these children deserve to have highly qualified teachers as their instructors. In essence, these teachers were willing to learn how to best serve students in this school community because this was their preferred educative space: A diverse, low-income marginalized school community.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

The three teachers and their school principal identify factors that lead to the retention of highly qualified teachers. Good working conditions, ongoing professional learning, connection to community, and relationships forged with students and families guarantee equal opportunity in education for their students are a few of these.

To retain highly qualified teachers and prepare them to confidently address the challenges incumbent in low-income marginalized school communities, school districts and administrators must seek to hire individuals who are interested in working in these environments. Additionally, these school communities must create positive working conditions, provide consistent and effective professional learning sessions, and have apertures to create opportunities for relationships to be forged with students and parents.

Overall, during the individual one-to-one interviews and the focus group interviews, the teachers and their principal did not focus on the deficits of the marginalized community in which the school is situated. Essentially, the highly qualified teachers in this study could have been hired elsewhere, but they intentionally remained in this school because they looked could see their students' potential; they could see a brighter and lucrative future for these youngsters.

Furthermore, effectively retaining teachers is critical to guaranteeing that there are sufficient well-prepared and committed teachers in marginalized communities and that the teachers in these classrooms have the experience and expertise to effectively serve all students. Teachers must love the students they teach on a daily basis; therefore, it is crucial that teachers love the population and the community that they serve. If it is that teachers are scared, miserable, and annoyed as they teach, they will not render their optimal service to their students. In addition, teachers will become emotionally and mentally drained, so one would say it would be in the teachers' best interest to leave that school community. Nevertheless, when a teacher leaves

a school, it influences the school as if that teacher had left the profession all together. These teacher moves affect students in marginalized school communities (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Although beyond the scope of this manuscript, the recruitment-retention dynamic is imperative to explore. Simply hiring a teacher just to fill a vacancy is one of the main issues. Therefore, structures must be in place to recruit educators who are resilient in their stance as it pertains to being open and willing to learn how to flourish as a teacher even in the face of adversity and have the tenacity to influence students in urban communities.

The participants in this study offered myriad reasons why they have remained in their marginalized school community. Nevertheless, there is a need for further inquiry to be done to determine if suitable working conditions, ongoing professional development, relationship with students and families, as well as intentionally selecting to be a teacher in these communities will truly heighten the retention of teachers in these school environments. To add to existing literature focused on teacher recruitment and retention, additional inquiry needs to focus on:

- Teacher preparation to educate students in urban, low-income marginalized schools
- Mindsets of highly qualified teachers in public schools who remain in low-income marginalized schools
- Characteristics of teachers who will succeed in marginalized schools
- The impact of teacher-student connection on retention of teachers in low-income marginalized schools

In essence, to increase the retention of highly qualified teachers in marginalized school communities, more research must be conducted with an intentional focus on education in urban communities. Nelson Mandela asserted, “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can

use to change the world.” Retaining highly qualified teachers is essential to offer and support an equitable future for students in marginalized schools.

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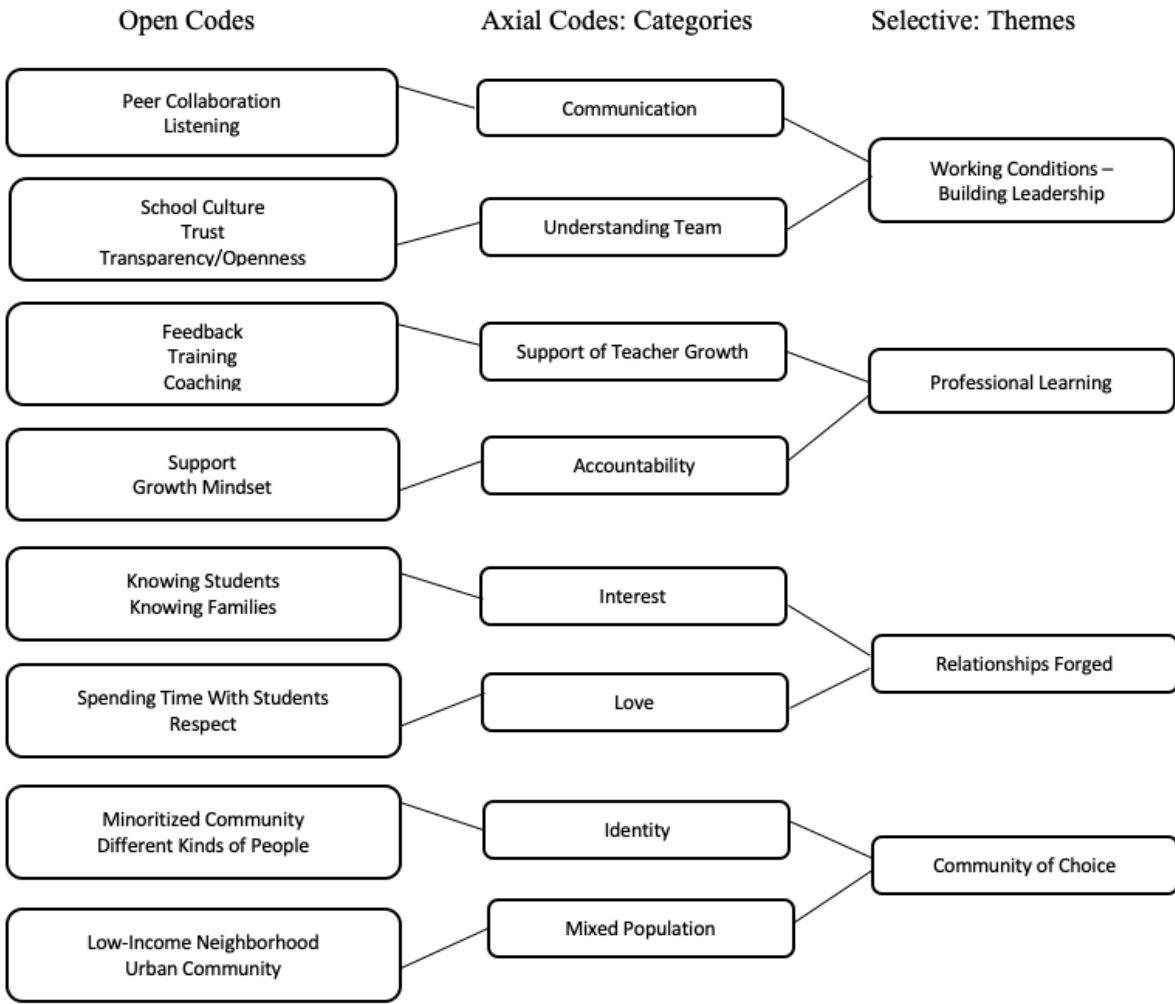
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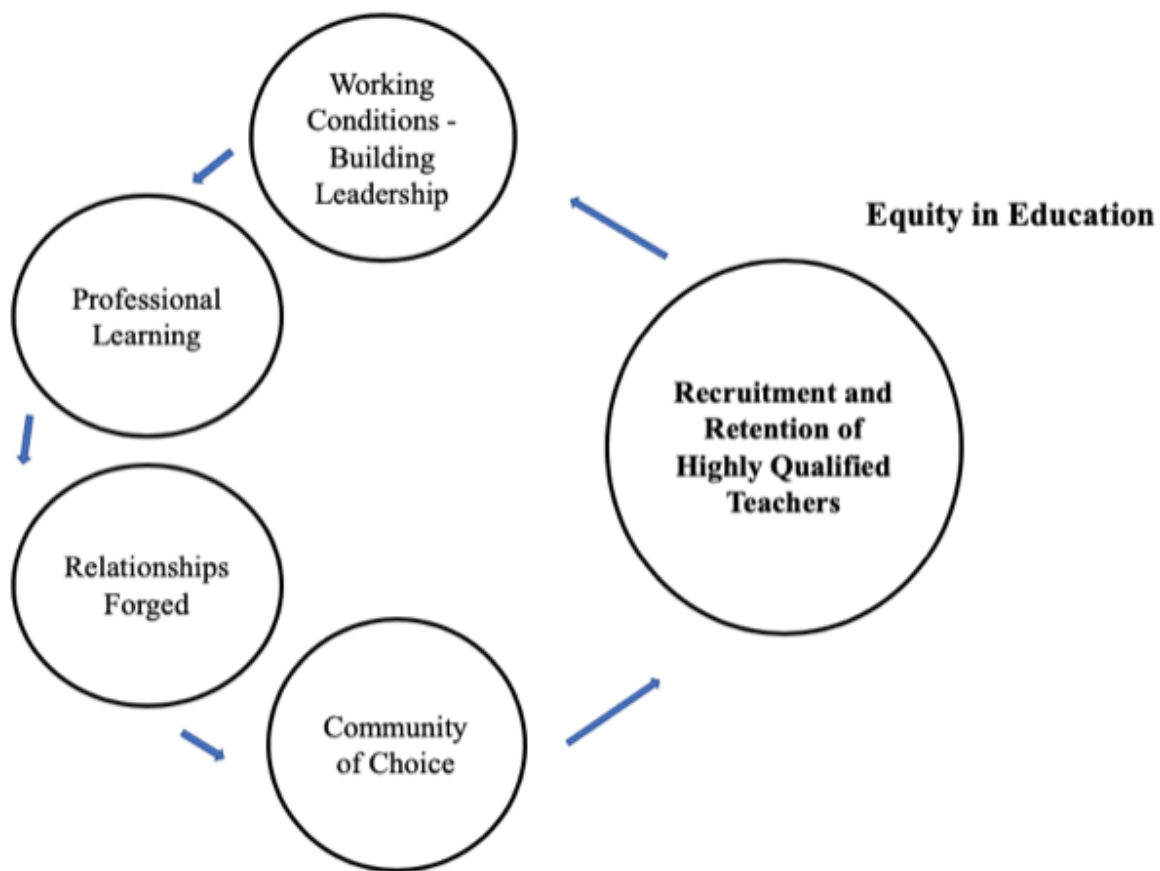
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*Figure 1*

*Coding Process for Recruitment and Retention of Highly Qualified Teachers*



**Figure 2.**  
*Factors that influence recruitment and retention of highly qualified teachers in marginalized school communities*



## Appendix A Survey Protocol for Educators

Below is a working protocol for the survey for educators.

**Introduction:** Thank you for making time to complete this survey. The answers to this survey will provide me with background information about you as an educator. You do not have to answer any questions if you don't want to and you can discontinue this survey at any time without consequence.

- 1) What is your role in the school?  
Please circle one: principal    teacher
  
- 2) Has this been your sole career?  
Please circle one:    yes                    no
  
- 3) If not, what was your other profession(s)?  
Please name the profession \_\_\_\_\_
  
- 4) How long have you been in the field of education? Please circle one:  
1-3 years      4-7 years      8-15 years      more than 16 years
  
- 5) How long have you been an educator in this school? Please circle one:  
1-3 years      4-7 years      8-15 years      more than 16 years
  
- 6) Have you taught in any other elementary school?  
Please circle all that apply:    yes                    no
  
- 7) What grade levels have you taught? Please circle one:  
3K-PreK      K-2      3-5      6-8      9-12
  
- 8) Have you ever experienced teaching by yourself in this school?  
Please circle one:    yes                    no
  
- 9) Have you taught with a co-teacher throughout your time as an educator in this school?  
Please circle one:    yes                    no
  
- 10) What is the main reason you have remained in this school community? Please circle one:  
location      children      salary      curriculum      other \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix B**

### **Interview Protocol for Teachers**

Below is a working protocol for the interview with teachers. I anticipate additional questions based on their responses.

Thank you for meeting with me to discuss hiring and retention of highly qualified teachers in elementary schools in marginalized communities. I would like to take some time to hear about your thoughts about your experiences at your school. You do not have to answer any questions if you don't want to and you can discontinue this interview at any time without consequence.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

- 1) How did you learn about the school in which you are now teaching?
- 2) Why did you choose to work at this school?
- 3) How long have you been a teacher in this school?
- 4) What practices, if any, at this school propel you to continue teaching at this school?
- 5) In your opinion, what are the qualities of a highly qualified teacher?
- 6) How, if at all, have you earned recognition as a highly qualified teacher?
- 7) Who do you think plays a key role in your decision to remain in this school?
- 8) Would you recommend other teachers to teach in this school community? Why?
- 9) Why have you remained in this school?
- 10) What, if any, administrators' strategies would you recommend as best practices to retain high quality teachers in an elementary in this community?

**Appendix C**  
**Observation Protocol for Teachers**

**Agreement to Participate**

First and Last Name	Signature	Date
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I agree to allowing [REDACTED] audio record interview sessions. Yes\_\_No\_\_

Signature	Date
-----------	------

I agree to allowing [REDACTED] audio tape the focus group sessions. Yes\_\_No\_\_

Signature	Date
-----------	------

I agree to allowing [REDACTED] to take photos of me teaching in class. Yes\_\_No\_\_

Signature	Date
-----------	------

I agree to allowing [REDACTED] to take videos of me teaching in class. Yes\_\_No\_\_

Signature	Date
-----------	------

I agree to meeting with [REDACTED] using audio tools (Example, phone or audio-only options on a videoconference platform) Yes\_\_No\_\_

Signature	Date
-----------	------

I agree to meeting with [REDACTED] using a videoconference platform (Example, Zoom, Webex, Facetime) Yes\_\_No\_\_

Signature	Date
-----------	------

I agree to allowing [REDACTED] to video record interview sessions. Yes\_\_No\_\_

Signature	Date
-----------	------

I agree to allowing [REDACTED] to video record focus group sessions. Yes \_\_ No \_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature Date

I agree to letting [REDACTED] review the audiotaped interview sessions and work related to classroom activities, and using the data in publications and/or conference presentations. Yes \_\_ No \_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature Date

I consent to having [REDACTED] review the information related to the study (e.g., audiotaped recordings, lesson plans, debriefing emails, surveys, field notes) and use the data in written, published reports and/or conference presentations.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature Date

I kindly ask that you return this form by taking a photo of the form or scanning it and emailing it to me at [REDACTED]



## Appendix D Focus Group Protocol for Educators

Below is a working protocol for the interview with the educators. *I anticipate additional questions based on their responses.*

**Introduction:** Thank you for meeting with me to discuss recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers. I would like to take some time to hear your thoughts about your experiences in the recruiting process and your experience at your school. You do not have to answer any questions if you don't want to and you can discontinue this focus group discussion at any time without consequence.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

- 1) Why did you join this focus group?
- 2) What led you to work at this school?
- 3) How would you describe your school community?
- 4) What, if any, role has your school played in your journey as an educator?
- 5) How do you communicate your feelings pertaining to teaching, as well as social and emotional learning in your school?
- 6) What practices contribute to your students' academic performance?
- 7) Why do you think it is that you have remained in this school for 3 or more years?
- 8) What, if any, is the most valuable characteristic of your school to you?
- 9) How do you define success in your role?
- 10) What, if any, teacher, parent, and/or student activity do you enjoy most in your school?