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Quartz, Karen Hunter

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Author: Karen Hunter Quartz and the TEP Research Group
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1320 Moore Hall Box 951521
Los Angeles, CA 90095
www.centerx.gseis.ucla.edu

“Too angry to leave”:

Supporting New Teachers’ Commitment to Transform Urban Schools

Karen Hunter Quartz and the TEP Research Group*

Center X and the Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access

Graduate School of Education and Information Studies

University of California, Los Angeles

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*Members of the TEP Research Group include (in alphabetical order): Charlene Asis, Kimberly Barraza-Lawrence, Noah deLissovoy, Megan Loef Franke, Frankie Gelbwachs, Joanna Goode, Laila Hassan, Peter Hoffman-Kipp, Rebecca Joseph, Peter Kim, Sheila Lane, Martin Lipton, Laura Lopez-Torres, Eloise Lopez Metcalfe, Theresa Montano, Nicole Elliot Murray, Jeannie Oakes, Jennifer Obidah,, Marianna Pacheco, Anne Powell, John Rogers, Jamy Stilman, Andrew Thomas, Rae Jeane Williams.

“Too angry to leave”:

Supporting New Teachers’ Commitment to Transform Urban Schools

Cicely grew up not far from the urban school where she now teaches. During her first year student teaching, she was robbed at gunpoint—a terrifying incident that clarified what she calls “a mission to help children see the range of possibilities for their lives so that they don’t see crime or this type of behavior as their only option.” She now teaches the younger siblings of the Kindergartners she taught five years ago. Still living in the community and buying her groceries alongside her students’ parents, Cicely is a deeply committed social justice educator. The longer she teaches, the more opportunities she finds to make her school caring and just. She is always frustrated by conditions familiar to so many who work in urban schools—an unsupportive administration, inadequate facilities, too few community supports, and so on. But she is buoyed by conditions that are not available to many urban teachers. She has the daily support of a partner teacher, monthly discussions with fellow UCLA alumni, her work as an editor of an online journal focused on social justice teaching, and more. Why does Cicely stay in teaching? She says she is “too angry to leave.”

Cicely received her teacher education in a program also fueled by anger. Watching the fires of civil unrest engulf Los Angeles following the 1992 Rodney King trial, faculty at UCLA created Center X to develop an approach to teaching that might help the city bridge its racial, political and economic divides. By 1995, this would become a research-based approach to urban teacher preparation that seeks to inform the efforts of other colleges and universities across the nation in preparing a high quality and stable teacher workforce for urban schools. (Oakes, 1996)

To date, Center X has graduated six cohorts—a total of 554 urban teachers. While we realize that this total pales in comparison to both the need for teachers and the graduation cohorts of many teacher education institutions, our scale affords us the luxury of following the career development of each Center X graduate while critically examining our own approach to urban teacher preparation and ongoing support.

This paper represents the first attempt to provide a systematic analysis of Center X’s approach to teacher preparation—one that we hope will inform others struggling to prepare, support and retain urban teachers. It combines quantitative data about the retention rates over five years of teachers prepared specifically as “social justice” urban educators with qualitative data about the type of preparation and ongoing support that the teachers experienced. Our analyses of these data allow us to suggest and probe those elements of preparation and support that may be efficacious in remedying urban schools’ “revolving door.” (Ingersoll, 2001b) While further longitudinal and comparative analyses of Center X graduates are required to make a stronger link between teacher preparation and retention, we present in this paper the first phase of our research to better understand the impact of our work with urban teachers. This single case study therefore attempts to extend the broad literature on teacher retention while establishing some groundwork for further investigations of urban teachers’ learning and career paths. We conclude with a proposal to reframe the professionalization of teaching debate to fit the realities of urban schools.

Shifting the Debate from Supply to Retention

Over the next decade, public school districts throughout the United States will need to hire approximately 2.2 million teachers, more than half of whom will enter the classroom for the first time (US Department of Education, 2000). Policy responses to this crisis in staffing schools

have focused on increasing the supply of incoming teachers, but little attention has been given to preparing and developing teachers who will remain teaching in urban schools. Ingersoll (2001b) argues that the assumption driving these policy responses is that converging demographic trends such as increased student enrollment and teacher retirements have created a massive teacher shortage that necessitates a whole host of interventions from peace corps-like recruitment strategies to alternative and emergency certification programs. Yet, based on data from the National Center for Educational Statistic's Schools and Staffing Survey, a large, nationally representative survey of teachers and schools, Ingersoll (2001b) offers an alternative explanation.

School staffing problems are neither synonymous with, nor primarily due to, teacher shortages in the conventional sense of a deficit in the supply of teachers. Rather, this study suggests that school staffing problems are primarily due to excess demand resulting from a "revolving door"—where large numbers of teachers depart their jobs for reasons other than retirement. (p.5)

Ingersoll's important study clearly shifts one of the most pressing educational puzzles—how to ensure that every child has a qualified teacher—from a debate about supply to a debate about retention. Retention research focusing on individual or micro-level analyses has created a fairly consistent portrait of the "leaver". We know that math, science, and special education teachers leave at higher rates than those in other academic fields. We also know that those who leave teaching permanently tend to be men seeking increased opportunities in other fields (Murnane, 1996). Women have higher attrition rates earlier in their careers due to family lifestyle issues related to marriage and child rearing. Age is also related to retention; younger teachers have a much higher turnover rate than their mid-career colleagues (Education Week, 2000). Several studies also find the majority of early leavers include individuals with higher

IQs, GPAs and standardized test scores and those with academic majors or minors along with an education degree (Darling-Hammond & Sclan, 1996; Murnane, 1996, 1991; Sclan, 1993).

Moreover, teachers who have earned advanced degrees within the prior two years leave at the highest rates (Boe, *et al.*, 1997). In short, early career teachers considered by many to be “the best and the brightest” are the ones most likely to leave.

Analyzing why these capable individuals leave teaching shifts the debate to a macro level. A number of studies, for instance, offer economic explanations. Low teachers’ salaries, researchers argue, provide one explanation of why these individuals leave teaching (Boe, *et al.*, 1997; Theobald, 1990; Murnane, 1991). With greater access to alternative careers that offer significantly higher pay scales, the opportunity cost of staying in teaching is unreasonable. In 1998, teachers ages 22-28 earned an average of \$7,894 less per year than other college-educated adults of the same age. From 1994-1998, salaries for master’s degree holders outside teaching increased 32%, or \$17,505, while the average salary for teachers increased less than \$200 (Education Week, 2000). These analyses suggest that one major hurdle to retention is teachers’ salary.

Other macro analyses offer sociological explanations of teacher attrition that center on the school as workplace. Permanent leavers, for instance, often cite dissatisfaction with workplace conditions as the major reason for their leaving; especially with their schools’ failure to encourage their autonomy or leadership (Ingersoll, 2001b; Johnson, 1990). Moreover, principals typically assign beginning teachers multiple course loads; these teachers leave faster than others do (Darling-Hammond, 1999). Conversely, teachers who stay do so, in part at least, because of collaborative and supportive school environments; as Sclan (1993) summarizes: “The extent to which schools provide collaborative work with other teachers, including time for

engagement in curriculum building and other professional tasks, strongly determines whether beginning teachers feel their efforts are worthwhile and whether they plan to remain in the profession.”

Urban Teacher Retention. While the challenge to retain highly competent teachers affects all schools, the crisis is critical in urban school districts, which historically suffer from a severe shortage of qualified teachers and typically fill vacancies with unlicensed teachers or full-time substitutes (Ingersoll, 1995, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 1999). There is some evidence that new teachers leave urban schools at higher rates than teachers in other schools. Haberman & Rickards (1990), for instance, found that in some urban districts one-half of the beginning teachers leave within a three to four year period, in contrast to a five or six year period for all new teachers. However, recent comprehensive studies suggest that the rate of teacher turnover (leavers and movers) in urban, high-poverty public schools is only slightly above average. For example, Ingersoll (2001b) reports that all schools experience an average of 13.2% turnover each year, with 6% leaving teaching and 7.2% moving to other schools. In poor, urban public schools turnover is 14.4%, with 5.7% leavers and 8.7% movers. Across all schools, the largest proportion of turnover was explained by job dissatisfaction and the desire to seek better jobs or career opportunities. As we discuss later in this paper, however, Ingersoll (2001b) also reports important differences in the reasons given by urban teachers who move or leave due to job dissatisfaction. Retaining teachers in urban schools is a challenge fraught with its own set of concerns.

A significant body of research and development has addressed this problem of urban teacher attrition by focusing on recruitment and selection strategies designed to attract non-traditional candidates to teaching. For instance, the Pathways program focused their recruitment

and training on paraprofessionals and teachers of color and found that both groups were more likely than the average new teacher to stay teaching in urban schools (Clewell and Villegas, 2001). Other related studies (as reviewed in Cochran-Smith, in press) focus on career changers, high school students, and more broadly, minority groups to better understand who chooses urban teaching as a career and why. This will be an important component of our second phase of research as we probe the effect of teachers' background and prior experiences on retention. At this point, however, we focus on the role of specialized preparation and ongoing support for teaching in urban schools.

What and How Should Urban Teachers Learn: Calls for a “New Multicultural Teacher Education”

A major gap in teacher preparation research, according to Wilson, Floden and Ferrini-Mundy (2001), is our lack of knowledge about how to prepare teachers for urban schools. The authors, moreover, call for research that links teacher preparation with induction and professional development to systematically examine the continuum of teacher learning experiences. An increasing number of university-based programs are exploring what this continuum should look like for urban teachers. As Cochran-Smith (in press) points out, “the last decade has seen a fairly consistent call for a ‘new multicultural teacher education.’”

The new teacher education would not add on to or supplement existing structures and paradigms, but fundamentally reinvent them by taking a resource rather than a deficit perspective on diversity. It would also challenge the ideological underpinnings of traditional programs, place knowledge about culture and racism front and center in the

teacher education curriculum, include teaching for social justice as a major outcome, and value the cultural knowledge of local communities.

Center X's Teacher Education Program (TEP) has shaped and responded to this call—representing an important instantiation of the national redesign effort. An intensive two-year program leading to state certification and a masters degree, Center X's TEP is followed by an Urban Educator Network (UEN) and on-going professional development that supports urban teachers as they continue their learning within schools. Core elements and principles of this program include:

- An explicit commitment to social justice, made real by continual struggle about what it means and how it is enacted in urban schools;
- Engaging a diverse group of faculty and teacher candidates in small, long-term learning communities (teams and cohorts);
- Viewing learning as social and dialogical inquiry within communities of practice;
- Constant grounding of practice in theory and of theory in practice, both in university courses and in K-12 fieldwork;
- Integrating the technical dimensions of teaching with the moral, cultural and political;
- Emphasizing the importance of knowing communities as well as knowing schools and classrooms;
- Extending formal preparation into the first year of teaching;
- Maintaining connections and support beyond the first year.

Guided by this non-traditional approach to urban teacher education, Center X struggles to create a bi-directional relationship between the university and urban communities. In addition to their field experience in urban classrooms, for instance, each Center X novice belongs to a community group that works together to identify and address local concerns. Engaged in these alternative learning communities, Center X faculty introduce students to a variety of theories with the intention of problematizing commonly accepted beliefs and practices surrounding ability, race, class, gender, language, difference, and so on. Center X prizes its critical culture where faculty model for students the intersection of theory and practice—the value of constantly

asking, “Whose interests does this practice serve?” or “Why do we do it this way?” Center X strives to be a community of practice (Wenger, 1998) where educators—including faculty, staff, graduate students, community members and novice teachers—learn and develop their identities by negotiating what it means to be a member of a social justice community. This negotiation is a constant struggle over how to balance a reified commitment to social justice, dissension, and concrete actions in schools.

Following the growing body of sociocultural research on learning, Center X maintains that its students learn as much—perhaps more—through enculturation into its critical, theory-rich learning environment as they do through explicit instruction in specific teaching skills and techniques (Putnam and Borko, 2000). In a recent review of “break-the-mold” urban teacher educators and teacher education programs, Ladson-Billings (1999) identifies similar institutional cultures, using critical race theory to “illustrate the possibilities for challenging dominant discourses of education and educational research.” Yet, as the cancellation of the University of Wisconsin-Madison’s “Teach for Diversity” master’s program illustrates, “destabilizing prospective teachers’ thinking while simultaneously preparing them to confront the rigors of urban teaching is ‘dangerous’ work.” (p. 240) As novices take on the skills, dispositions and beliefs of social justice educators, they deepen their understanding of self in the surrounding political economy—how their “everyday actions challenge or support various oppressions and injustices related to social class, race, gender, sexual preference, religion, and numerous other factors.” (Zeichner, 1996)

In stark contrast, research on traditional teacher education over the last 20 years suggests that novice teachers’ beliefs remain unchanged from the beginning to the end of their program and that they graduate with little sense of how the theories they learned relate in any practical

way to their actual teaching (Ball & McDiarmid, 1990; Borko & Putnam; 1996, Brown, 1992; Thompson, 1992). Reasons that teachers abandon the theory “taught” in conventional teacher preparation programs are complex. However, it is clear that teachers, especially novices, find few schools, few colleagues, few broader social supports, and little theory for going against the grain of conventional teaching (Cochran-Smith, 1991). This is especially true in urban schools dominated by status quo teaching, abysmal working conditions, and large bureaucracies that are typically isolated from local communities (Kozol, 1991; Mirel, 1999; Weiner, 2000). For these reasons, some urban teacher education programs such as Center X extend their reach into local schools and communities in an attempt to create alternative sites of both “preservice” and “inservice” teacher learning.

As novices and their more experienced colleagues share the work of urban teaching, they develop the trust, mutual understandings, and relationship skills needed to build and sustain support for change. These relationships allow them to see as “normal” their inevitable roles as outsider/reformer, while acquiring the skills and dispositions to disrupt conventional practices in their classrooms and across their school. In many cases, these “social justice educators” are welcomed at their schools as valued colleagues rather than being marginalized as threats to the status quo. These identities merge roles as successful teachers with practices as school leaders and change agents in urban classrooms, schools, and communities. And significantly, as we explore next, they begin to see teaching in urban schools as a career to stick with over the long run.

Tracking Urban Teachers: Methods and Data

Study Population. Most Center X graduates are in their early twenties when they enter the classroom, approximately four out of five are women, and together they are ethnically

diverse—41% Anglo compared to 91% nationwide—representing more than a dozen ethnicities. Center X also attracts extremely capable individuals—students with competitive GRE scores—who would have access to any number of professions, most of which would pay them handsomely for their talents. Nationally, fewer than six percent of all education graduates express a desire for inner-city placements (The National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching, 2000), yet for Center X graduates, teaching in such schools defines their professional identity. Working in Los Angeles' hardest to staff schools, graduates face challenges quite different from the typical educator.

Data Collection: The first phase of our research occurred over two years and relied on both qualitative and survey methodologies. As part of a systematic effort to track graduates, Center X maintains an alumni database that records contact information along with employment or basic retention data (place of work, work role, e.g., classroom teacher, principal). This basic retention data was collected for all but 19 or 6% of the 326 teachers who graduated between 1997 and 2000, enabling a high level of confidence in contrast to retention studies of other hard-to-track populations. In order to understand graduates' reasons for staying or leaving urban schools, we designed two instruments. In the spring of 2000, we recruited 15 members of the Urban Educator Network to help us design, pilot, and conduct in-depth phone interviews with the 233 teachers who graduated between 1997-1999. The following year, we used an electronic survey to probe why the growing graduate population (N=326) was staying, switching or leaving urban schools. In both cases, securing responses was a challenge that required multiple follow-up attempts, yielding a response rate of 64% for the 2000 phone interviews and 52% for the 2001 electronic surveys. A comparison of the demographic characteristics and retention status of the

respondents versus the entire graduate population revealed, in both cases, no significant biases (Quartz *et al.*, 2001).

Retention Statistics. According to measures used in most retention studies, our graduates are the ones most at risk for leaving the profession. They are young, represent “the best and the brightest,” and they work in the hardest to staff schools. Yet, we see just the opposite. As Table 1 summarizes, Center X graduates stay in teaching at higher rates than national averages. As expected, retention decreases over time, yet even after five years, 70% of Center X graduates remain in the classroom compared to 61% of teachers nationally. This five-year 39% attrition rate for new teachers is based on the Department of Education's Staffing and Schooling Survey (SASS), as reported by Ingersoll (2001a). Other comparison data are based on significant state databases (e.g., Kirby & Grissmer, 1993; Murnane, 1991), but most of the data reinforce the theme that new teachers, i.e. those with five or less years of experience, are most likely to leave teaching. For instance, Kirby & Grissmer's (1993) study of 50,000 Indiana teachers found that one third of teachers with five or less years of experience left teaching at a time of low teacher attrition in the state. The national three-year attrition rate from the SASS data for new teachers is 29%, in stark contrast to Center X's 10%.

Table 1: Retention of Center X Graduates by Cohort

2001 Retention Data	5 th yr. Teaching 1997 graduates N=75 n=69	4 th yr. Teaching 1998 graduates N=79 n=71	3 rd yr. Teaching 1999 graduates N=83 n=79	2 nd yr. Teaching 2000 graduates N=89 n=88	Across all cohorts N=326 n=307
Still a Classroom Teacher	48/69 (70%)	62/71 (87%)	71/79 (90%)	83/88 (94%)	264/307 (86%)
Still in Education	60/69 (87%)	67/71 (94%)	75/79 (95%)	86/88 (98%)	288/307 (94%)
Left Education	9/69 (13%)	4/71 (6%)	4/79 (5%)	2/88 (2%)	19/307 (6%)

Looking more closely at the first cohort’s retention, the 30% attrition rate is deceiving. Graduates who left the classroom were asked to report what they were doing. As we expected, many graduates—an additional 17% of our first cohort—were still in education although they had left the classroom. These graduates included school administrators, graduate students studying education, a college professor, Peace Corps teachers, curriculum specialists, teacher educators, educational technology experts, counselors and others. Although they had switched roles, they had not left the education profession and importantly most were still working in urban communities. Most retention research fails to make this distinction and therefore misses the opportunity to track and fully understand the career development of all educators. As we discuss in depth in our analysis, teachers’ career trajectories are multi-faceted. Whether they stay, move

or leave provides important workforce data, yet we think a richer portrait of what they do when they stay, move or leave provides an essential window to understanding how to improve “a teacher pipeline that more closely resembles a leaky faucet.” (Education Week, 2000).

Analysis

Analyzing why Center X grads tend to stay in teaching at higher rates than others presents a number of challenges. With no adequate comparison sample, conclusions regarding the link between Center X participation and retention are problematic. To date, we have no way of controlling for self-selection bias. People who choose Center X may have a greater than average determination to stick with teaching as a profession. Or, as some of the research indicates, they may be most at risk for leaving. In Phase Two of our research, we are addressing this issue both by probing the views and characteristics of incoming Center X students and by constructing an adequate comparison sample from national data. We are also tracking a set of career development variables over five years for the growing population of Center X graduates and intend to use survival analysis to understand what explains the “survival” of highly-qualified teachers in urban schools over time.

At this point, our analysis of these retention statistics must center on self reports from teachers about their career development and our collective experience, many of us as teacher educators, in following their careers and understanding the contexts in which they work. Though far from a tightly controlled analysis of the individual characteristics of stayers and leavers, there is merit in this more holistic approach. Analyzing retention from a micro perspective tends to oversimplify the factors that impact teachers’ career choices. Moreover, as Weiner (2000, p.395) describes Bilken’s feminist position on this subject: “the predilection to examine individual characteristics of the teacher reflects a gendered construction of teaching, endorsement of the

‘heroic model’ of teaching that views the teacher as a kind of Lone Ranger figure working in isolation, dedicating herself without limit to teaching.” Too often this image of the “star” urban teacher as either martyr or hero is invoked to explain macro level phenomena such as retention. Yet, not only are these explanations typically anecdotal, perhaps even misogynistic, they provide very little guidance for universities and others struggling to educate and support urban teachers within the broader context of under-funded, over-crowded, inefficient and sometimes corrupt urban school systems. The real heroes of urban schools are those who figure out ways to stay connected to their profession, their pursuit of social justice, their colleagues, their students and their communities. These heroes are not born; they emerge from an extensive network of supports and a solid understanding of pedagogy. Below, we examine three themes that emerged from our survey and interview data that may inform the work of teacher educators and others concerned with the career development of urban teachers.

Learning to Build on the Strengths of Urban Communities. Center X helps students form understandings that focus on discovering the strengths of the urban communities in which they teach. This challenge to dominant deficit conceptions of urban students and their families enables teachers to locate their frustrations within society’s broader structures of inequality. All Center X students hear a related message; in the words of Valencia and Solorzano (1997): “One aspect of deficit thinking that fails to die is the major myth that low-income parents of color typically do not value the importance of education, fail to inculcate such a value in their children, and seldom participate—through parental involvement activities—in the education of their offspring.” (p.190)

Given the prominence of non-deficit theories and conversations during their training, we wanted to see how our graduates framed what puzzled them most about urban teaching.

Immersed in urban school cultures, would their responses now reflect the dominant deficit myth about students and parents? We asked each of the graduates to provide two examples of teaching frustrations or puzzles and then we coded their answers according to whether they expressed a deficit view of students, their families, or communities. Only 13% of Center X graduates focused exclusively on deficits; these deficits included: “Parents don’t respond when teachers offer help,” “Students are apathetic” or, “There’s no home support. Parents expect teachers to do everything for kids’ learning.” Most framed their frustrations either in terms of the poor working conditions in their particular schools or in terms of the social neglect of urban schools more generally: not enough prep time; no permanent classroom, society’s lack of investment in schools, and so on. Eloquently capturing a frustration expressed by many graduates, one teacher responded:

[I’m frustrated by] the extent of social inequalities reproduced in schools, social reproduction. Kids go in poor; they come out poor. Changes need to take place in the larger society, not just in schools. Schools could do a better job of producing more equitable educational /career outcomes.

This finding is especially interesting in light of Ingersoll’s (2001b) recent report of the differences between urban and all teachers’ explanations for why they move from or leave their schools. Teachers from high-poverty urban schools are more likely than the average teacher to cite students’ lack of motivation and discipline problems as reasons for their dissatisfaction. Given this link between deficit conceptions and urban teacher attrition, we suggest conversely that non-deficit conceptions may be a crucial factor in retaining good urban teachers. Consider the story of Brian and Maria.

In one East Los Angeles community, Center X student teachers Brian and Maria worked on creating an asset map of potential education-related resources. At the outset, Brian shared with classmates his feelings of detachment as he drove to and from the community. Maria initially saw the place as barren, starved of resources. After contacting neighborhood churches, libraries, community groups and other organizations, the picture softened. Community leaders referred them to alternative sites such as homes used for tutorials and meetings. Gradually, deficit conceptions of the community gave way. On the last day of class, Maria spoke with excitement about the many community networks she had discovered. The detachment Brian once felt had disappeared; as he explained his shift in perspective:

The green building on the corner I have passed many times before is no longer just a stucco structure but this is a place where community folks come on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays to pick up food items from Ms. Rodriguez. The yellow wooden house across from the liquor store is an after school site for tutorial. The narrow brown and black Evangelist church provides college access information and each week this community has over six neighborhood watch groups meeting, in which community members discuss a broad range of community issues including schooling, quality education and teenage violence. At one of these meetings I attended, Ms. Garcia, a neighborhood watch leader expressed her group's interest in connecting with teachers and the school to discuss how they could work together to provide alternate learning sites for students after school.

The experience left both novices with big plans for their first year teaching. Maria envisioned Open House extending beyond one evening's short presentation about the limited resources of

the classroom. Both she and Brian wanted to ensure that they worked alongside parents and community members to fully understand and tap into the riches of their urban neighborhoods.

Becoming a Change Agent. Once Brian and Maria enter the classroom, they'll need a strong sense of efficacy to both build on local strengths and change conditions external to students and their parents. Yet, it is a daunting prospect indeed to feel efficacious in the face of socially reproduced inequities writ large. How do urban teachers make sense of these challenges? How do they define the struggle for social justice in everyday terms? What does it mean to act as a generative change agent? To address these issues, we asked graduates two related questions: "Do you feel you are contributing to the learning or growth of other adults at your school and in the broader community? If so, can you give an example or two?" and "Do you feel you have made your school or school community a more just or caring place? If so, can you give an example or two?"

Most respondents (82%) said that they contribute to the learning and growth of other adults, suggesting a high level of self-efficacy. Some teachers reported mentoring new and student teachers at their school, and providing curriculum resources and assistance to veteran teachers in specific content areas; as one teacher commented: "Yes, I got the department moving forward....We looked at curriculum guidelines and developed a curriculum that flowed from grade to grade." Center X graduates have also taken on a variety of other leadership positions, for example, department chair or technology mentor. Moving beyond the explicit curriculum, teachers talk about "starting discussions that maybe wouldn't have started" around issues such as social justice, race, and cultural identity. Teachers develop relationships with parents that open up conversations, increase involvement, and help parents "stand up for their rights."

Similarly, 86% of respondents indicated that they have made their school a more just or caring place. Many teachers have done so by connecting with and respecting parents and students who typically receive little if any respect. Examples of how teachers attempt, within their classrooms, to make their schools more just or caring included the following responses: establishing high expectations for all students, offering exciting science labs, teaching history from a non-Eurocentric point of view, and opening discussions about race, gender, status and other social issues. Others reported their involvement on school committees; one teacher worked hard to heighten safety by increasing teacher presence on the school yard; someone else acted as Site Coordinator for an after-school program, and others made strong connections with students through students' council, sports or music. Still other teachers made structural changes such as detracking classes, providing access to computer science for girls, teaching in multi-age classrooms, and facilitating college access.

One group of responses, however, speaks to the issue of efficacy itself. A significant number of teachers framed their efforts to make schools more just or caring in terms of advocacy and agency. As one teacher said: "I make sure all student voices are heard, that families and students are aware of what power they hold and ways to access that power." Teaching students and parents themselves to feel efficacious is an important component of teachers' own sense of efficacy and, we would argue, their competency. Developing this competency is a crucial component of Center X's preservice and inservice activities. Teacher education classes and professional development experiences are consistently guided by the question: How can we enrich students' learning experiences and their levels of achievement by focusing on issues of cultural diversity, race, social class, gender, and, more broadly, social justice? Consider Miranda's story.

Miranda, a fifth grade teacher, works in a neighborhood of Central American immigrants—most of whom speak little if any English. Integrated into her classwork during her 1st year of teaching, Miranda involved her students and their parents in a study of lead and its impact on health issues, especially for young children. Health department officials met with students and parents multiple times, as did representatives from the local City Councilperson's office. Students studied chemistry to understand the nature of lead. They also went out into their community to collect paint fragments and soil in which children played and then had these samples tested for lead content. As a culminating activity, Miranda invited families to a potluck dinner where students presented informational posters they had made—presentations that involved explaining complex chemical processes. The room was packed; almost every parent attended and the evening was conducted exclusively in Spanish. Some parents joined their children in presenting the lead findings, yet a few felt ill equipped to do so. One parent explained that she hadn't done anything because she didn't know any English and hadn't attended school herself in her home country. Feeling the tension in the room, Miranda respectfully addressed all the parents, explaining that they had all played important roles in this project, motivating their children and setting rules to ensure that projects were completed successfully. As these students move on to middle school, she continued, parents will play a crucial role in ensuring their children's future success in school. Knowing English and possessing a formal education, she assured parents, were not required. Herself a Central American immigrant, Miranda empathized with parents, yet her message was one of empowerment and therefore social change.

Joining a Profession. Miranda continues to develop her curricular repertoire, committed to the teaching profession as a career. Like any career, however, ensuring that Miranda and her colleagues remain challenged and fulfilled in their work depends on providing opportunities to

tackle new knowledge and skills, achieve mastery, receive recognition, and benefit from the support of good colleagues as well as effective leaders. As the extensive efforts to professionalize teaching underscore, many schools lack these crucial workplace features or opportunities for teacher learning and development. Teaching has traditionally been an isolating profession. In addition, once they enter the classroom, teachers typically perform the same type of tasks every day, have the same status, all earning the same compensation. The only way to escape the routinization of the classroom or earn more compensation has been to leave the profession and many teachers have.

Nowhere is the struggle for professionalism more acutely felt than in urban schools. Compared to the average “leaver,” teachers who leave high-poverty urban schools are much more likely to cite poor opportunities for professional advancement as a reason for their dissatisfaction. They are also more likely to bemoan their colleagues’ lack of professional competence. (Ingersoll, 2001b) In our own data, we looked carefully at the graduates who decided to leave their urban schools but remain in an education-related field. The results of a logistical regression show that the odds of leaving schools but remaining in education are eight times greater for graduates who describe their teacher preparation as extremely intellectually challenging (Quartz, *et. al.*, 2001). One interpretation of this finding—the “smartest” teachers leave the fastest—is consonant with much retention research.

In schools traditionally considered “dumping grounds” for teachers, these findings are hardly surprising. Stories abound that document the ineptness of urban school bureaucracies in recognizing good teaching. It might be punishing highly competent teachers because they managed to inspire a greater diversity of students to earn college credit through Advanced Placement courses (Matthews, 2001), or refusing the state’s Teacher of the Year a transfer to a

high-poverty urban school—one in which the principal had received seven first-year teachers that year, three of whom lacked full-time teaching credentials (R. Johnson, 2001). In some urban schools, the case is even worse; the underqualified teachers on emergency permits outnumber those with credentials. (Shields, *et. al*, 2000) Imagine entering such a school as a novice. Who would you look to as a mentor? What structure would support your desire to develop innovative curricula the way Miranda did? How could you trust that a maligned bureaucracy wouldn't thwart your best efforts? Why would you stay?

Center X attempts to remedy these woeful conditions using a variety of strategies for professional growth: an Urban Educatoar Network (UEN), an online journal (www.TeachingToChangeLA.org) (TCLA), extensive professional development through the California Subject Matter Projects (CSMP), and ongoing support to achieve certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). All of these strategies are crucial opportunities for teacher learning and all, we believe, contribute to Center X's high retention rates. UEN provides an inquiry-based forum for graduates' development during their first few years of teaching. Teachers like Cicely, Maria, Brian and Miranda meet monthly to share stories and work through struggles. In addition, Center X trains a corps of alumni facilitators who regularly lead inquiry and book discussion groups with fellow alumni. This network also trains graduates to mentor first and second year teachers. Still others participate in Center X advisory groups with principals and other administrators. Scaffolding these in-person support and inquiry groups, TCLA provides an online network for teachers, students, and parents to share the work of urban teaching. CSMP training helps teachers strengthen their content background, develop a repertoire of teaching strategies, refine their understanding of reform in content areas and develop their leadership expertise. Many participants become institute

directors, facilitators, and presenters. Finally, the NBPTS process engages teachers in describing, analyzing, and reflecting upon their teaching and their students' work, culminating in certification that brings with it higher pay and status.

Center X graduates also participate in a variety of other professional communities. In addition to the more common affiliations with state and national educational organizations, many are members of activist organizations that promote social justice in urban schools. Groups such as the Coalition for Educational Justice (CEJ) or the California Consortium of Critical Educators (CCCE) give early career urban teachers the support they need to engage as change agents, both within and outside their classrooms. (Montano, *et al.*, 2001) For instance, Noah, a third year urban high-school teacher, is currently working with a diverse group of civic, legal and educational leaders to draft an Educational Bill of Rights. Noah comes to the table as one of CEJ's leaders and advocates to include freedom from high-stakes testing in the bill—a document the group hopes to use as a part of a legal remedy in the educational adequacy civil suit, *Williams v. the State of California*. Engaged in this important work, Noah is firmly planted in the education profession with no plans to leave his post.

Our data suggest that with each year in schools, urban teachers become increasingly rooted in their profession. Significant differences exist across cohorts of graduates who responded to likert scale questions that probed their professional lives. Of particular note, the extent to which teachers report learning from colleagues outside their schools is correlated with years of experience; teachers in their fifth year of work are much more likely to look for external professional affiliations to guide their teaching than their more novice colleagues. They do not define urban school workplaces as their only, or their most significant, community of practice and at times “dis-identify” themselves from their schools (Hodges, 1998). Interestingly, fifth-

year teachers also report higher levels of professional respect—from colleagues, their administration, and their students. Beyond their initial induction, these teachers are entering a crucial stage in their career. Searching out ways to build on and extend their talents, these competent urban teachers look to their profession for alternatives. Their retention depends on it.

Conclusion: Professionalizing Urban Teaching

Efforts to professionalize teaching, such as NBPTS, will create more learning opportunities and career advancement for teachers, yet our data and experience working with Center X graduates underscores the importance of tailoring these efforts to meet the particular needs of urban teachers, their schools and their communities. As we have argued throughout this paper, the problem of teacher attrition is best viewed from a socio-cultural perspective: what sorts of communities of practice nurture and support social justice educators? Center X joins a growing group of urban teacher educators who are struggling with this question, yet the struggle is too often confined to the structure of formal teacher education programs and important but short-term induction programs. We propose extending the professionalization of teaching debate into the realm of urban schools. What would it mean, for example, to develop professional standards for urban teaching? Might it involve teachers demonstrating their mastery of activist skills the way Noah does when he participates through CEJ to create an Educational Bill of Rights? NBPTS's fifth core proposition states that teachers should be members of learning communities, and this includes finding "ways to work collaboratively and creatively with parents, engaging them productively in the work of the school." What would it mean to capture the rich context of Miranda's lead project—of immigrant parents struggling alongside their children to present chemistry research—in this proposition? How might Brian and Maria's asset

mapping in East Los Angeles redefine the boundaries between school, parents and community?

These types of questions will guide our future research on how best to facilitate and support the development of social justice educators.

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