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Authors

Brad Olsen
Lauren Anderson

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Retention Report Series: A Longitudinal Study of Career Urban Educators

A Research Report

prepared by

UCLA's Institute for

Democracy,

Education, & Access

**Brad Olsen
&**

Lauren Anderson

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UCLA's Institute for Democracy, Education, & Access

University of California, Los Angeles

Retention Report Series: A Longitudinal Study of Career Urban Educators

The papers in this series reflect the on-going work of researchers studying the career pathways of educators who received specialized urban teacher preparation through UCLA's Center X Teacher Education Program (TEP). This longitudinal study extends from 2000-2006, adding a new TEP cohort each year, to track more than a thousand urban educators in their first through tenth year of the profession. Together, the papers that report this longitudinal research seek to inform teacher retention policy by addressing the unique challenge of creating and supporting career pathways in education that serve high poverty schools and students. The papers in this series are available to download from the IDEA web site located at www.ucla-idea.org.

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Courses of Action: A Report on Urban Teacher Retention and Career Development

Brad Olsen
University of California, Los Angeles

Lauren Anderson
University of California, Los Angeles

June 2004

Correspondence:

Brad Olsen
University of California, Santa Cruz
Education Dept.
1156 High St.
Santa Cruz, CA 95065
bolsen@ucsc.edu
(831) 459-4933

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Abstract

This paper presents findings from a study investigating relationships among the reasons for entry, preparation experiences, workplace conditions, and future career plans of fifteen UCLA Teacher Education Program graduates working in urban elementary schools in Los Angeles. More specifically, the analysis examines why these early career teachers stay in or consider leaving the urban schools in which they are teaching. The findings highlight the need to reconceptualize notions of teacher retention in order to better acknowledge and support the development of deep, varied, successful careers in the field of urban education. The data suggest that these urban teachers will remain in urban education if they can adopt multiple education roles inside and outside the classroom, and receive professional support during the whole of their professional careers not just the beginnings of their teaching.

Teachers in the United States: Is There a Shortage?

Schools' highly publicized inability to successfully staff all public school classrooms with qualified teachers has captured the nation's attention.¹ According to recent reports, remedying this staffing crisis will require hiring more than two million new teachers over the next ten years (Hussar, 1999). Though often termed a "teacher shortage" and overwhelmingly attributed to simultaneous increases in retirement and student enrollments, schools' staffing crisis actually results in large part from teacher turnover—the rate at which teachers migrate from one school to another ("movers") or leave teaching altogether ("leavers") (Ingersoll, 2001). For many of those whom Ingersoll terms leavers, teaching is a short-term endeavor. Nearly twenty percent of new teachers abandon the profession entirely within three years of having entered (Henke, Chen, & Geis, 2000), while as many as forty-six percent leave within their first five years (Ingersoll, 2002, 2003).

Despite such seemingly staggering levels of early career attrition, teachers' migration from school to school accounts for a near equal portion of overall teacher turnover. In addition to the 290,000 teachers who left the profession in 1999, 250,000 moved from one school to another following a general migration pattern toward more affluent schools and districts (Ingersoll, 2003). Together this amounts to over half a million jobs in flux annually, an enormous financial and organizational burden for schools to bear. Not surprisingly, of all public schools, those located in urban, low-income communities suffer the most acute staffing problems (Haycock, 1998; NCTAF, 2003; Ingersoll, 2001, 2002, 2003). On the whole, teachers in high-poverty schools are fifty percent more likely to migrate or leave than those in low-poverty schools (Ingersoll, 2003). In response to losing disproportionate numbers of teachers each year, high-

poverty schools often fill resulting vacancies with underqualified teachers who not only are less prepared to teach, but also migrate and leave schools at higher rates than their certified peers (Darling-Hammond, Wise, & Klein, 1995; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Henke et al., 2000).

In light of such inequity the following questions, which compose the guiding frame for this paper and for the study on which it is based, demand sustained attention. Who enters the teaching profession, where, why, and for how long? What compels teachers to stay or leave a particular school, or more broadly, to stay or leave teaching altogether? And under what circumstances do highly qualified teachers choose to stay in schools that need them most?

Teacher Education at UCLA: Center X

Created in 1994 under the guidance of Jeannie Oakes and Lynn Beck, Center X is a two-year urban teacher preparation master's program and a set of state-wide professional development efforts for teachers (Oakes, 1996; Olsen et al., in press).² The mission of this teacher education program is to prepare teachers for successful work as social justice educators in urban schools. The curriculum stresses views of inequity as structural, activism as necessary, multiculturalism as central, and the critical study of race and culture as crucial. The program rejects purely technical, social efficiency models of teaching and learning in favor of culturally relevant pedagogy, sociocultural learning approaches, and moral-political dimensions of teaching. Teacher candidates are put into small learning teams in which they meet regularly for two years, engaging around notions of social learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978), funds of knowledge (Moll, 1988, 1998), language acquisition (Cummins, 1996, 2000) and cultural identity (Tatum, 1998). Center X partners exclusively with school districts in high priority, high poverty neighborhoods—those urban communities most in need of committed,

highly qualified teachers. Though Center X remains a work-in-progress, and has varying degrees of success, it offers a specialized, intensive preparation experience.

Investigating the Career Development of Center X Graduates

The study on which this paper reports is part of a larger research project investigating urban teacher retention and the preparation of teachers at Center X (Quartz & The TEP Research Group, 2003; Quartz, Barraza-Lyons & Thomas, in press). The larger project has been collecting longitudinal survey data on hundreds of program graduates, and employing statistical analyses to better understand the retention rates and career paths of these specially trained urban educators. As a subset of that larger project, this study is a qualitative investigation into the interdependencies among reasons for entry, preparation experiences, workplace conditions, professional development opportunities, and future career plans of a handful of Center X graduates working in urban Los Angeles elementary schools.³ More specifically, this study examines why early career teachers stay in or consider leaving the urban schools in which they currently teach.

We purposefully selected four urban elementary schools with which Center X partners, choosing one school in each of four Los Angeles Unified School District sub-districts. We then employed stratified random selection to choose four early career teachers from each school, seeking a sample that would reflect the larger Center X population in gender, race/ethnicity, self-reported degree of satisfaction with preparation experience, and self-reported commitment to future teaching.⁴ Hindered by population constraints, the sample consists of fifteen (not sixteen) teachers; however, their reported satisfactions with program and commitments to teaching are more or less evenly distributed in the sample, and their gender and race/ethnicity distributions

approximately reflect the overall Center X graduate population.⁵ See Table 1 (Demographic Breakdown of the Fifteen Informants) for this and other demographic information.⁶

INSERT TABLE ONE ABOUT HERE

The research design includes three 60-minute, semi-structured, audiotaped interviews conducted with each teacher during the 2003-04 academic year—one in fall, one in winter, and one in spring. Ninety-minute classroom observations accompanied the second round of interviews. For analysis, data was coded, portraits of the teachers and their schools were created, and various analytical relationships among and across codes, teachers, and themes were explored (Becker, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1984). This paper examines the perspectives and meaning-systems the teachers express, and introduces those themes which appear to structure their evolving career plans.⁷

Career Paths and Professional Perspectives

The fifteen urban elementary teachers report a range of future plans. At first glance, the teachers seem to articulate as many ideas about their futures as there are informants, but upon closer inspection some patterns emerged. We found that all teachers can be placed into one of three categories of current career status: *Stayers* (plan to continue teaching indefinitely), *Uncertains* (either cannot speculate about their future, or intend to teach awhile longer and then leave teaching), and *Leavers* (leaving the classroom but staying in education). Table 2 (Current Career Status of Participating Teachers) presents the teachers and their categories.⁸

INSERT TABLE TWO ABOUT HERE

One clarifying point about our category names is that those teachers in the right-hand column, those whom we term “leavers,” are not in fact leaving the field of education but rather are leaving classroom teaching. This detail is significant because many studies on teacher retention, finding the once-teachers no longer employed as teachers, would label them as having left teaching (e.g., Ingersoll, 2001, 2002, 2003). On most measures, then, our three “leavers” (20% of our sample) would be counted as attrition. While that is technically true, it ignores the fact that they have not left the profession *per se* (or, as we will explain later, have not abandoned their initial reasons for entry) but are moving into other dimensions of urban education work. Every “leaver” in our sample reports still being strongly committed to urban education but is electing to pursue professional goals through other kinds of education work. This also holds true for many of the uncertain. We might, therefore, term them “shifTERS” instead, for they have shifted, or are planning to shift, the kind of work they do, yet they appear to remain committed to the goals that first brought them into urban teaching. We revisit this point throughout the paper.

The Three Categories of Career Status

To delve inside the cursory numbers and career categories, we focused our analysis on the fifteen teachers themselves. Taken individually, each teacher’s story puts a human face on teacher retention and professional development research, and taken as a whole the stories provide a rich cross-case analysis of influences on career decisions around urban teaching. In this section,

we introduce some of the teachers' stories while discussing the three career categories. In the subsequent section we explore themes across the whole sample.

Stayers (6 of 15)

There are some caveats to the stayers' plans to continue teaching indefinitely. We found that choosing to stay in teaching is not about simply remaining behind the closed door of one's classroom until retirement. The stayers report complex and varied plans for their teaching futures, and most expect their roles and responsibilities to change and grow over time. Mei and Anthony report a desire to earn a Ph.D. without leaving teaching. Maeve and Leah report an interest in pursuing certification from the National Board for Professional Teacher Standards. One stayer says it is possible that she will leave teaching for a few years to have kids of her own. Finally, not all stayers intend to remain where they are: Maeve is moving at the end of this year to another urban school in a different state because she must leave California to tend to an ill spouse. Two other stayers report that they may leave their present schools eventually—one because of the administration, and the other because of the parents in the community.

Leah. Leah, an undergraduate music major from the Midwest, planned to become a music teacher until she began tutoring students of color and English Language Learners. Now, after five years as an early elementary teacher, Leah reports that she plans to remain teaching indefinitely at the school where she has worked since first entering the classroom. Asked why, she answers, "Because I've invested so much, and I love the community and I love the families. I wouldn't leave."

Leah values what she considers to be a supportive administration and school culture. She loves being able to team-teach with a good friend who is also a fellow Center X graduate. The

two spend a few hours each week planning together. Leah is also connected to a larger network of co-workers without whom, she says, “I wouldn’t have survived the first few years. I probably would have left the profession.” She meets regularly with ten teachers as part of an inquiry group and more often (for example, Sunday brunch every few weeks) with a smaller group whom she counts among her closest friends. Though happy with her career choice, Leah still finds teaching challenging, and mentions connections with her peers as a major source of strength and inspiration: “You can’t just be an island...it’s too emotionally exhausting.”

The principal at Leah’s school actively supports group and individual efforts to “improve the culture of the school.” With other members of the Inquiry Group, Leah has planned and hosted school-wide family nights. Last year, she applied for and received a grant to create a school garden, which has since been built and now contains classroom plots where teachers and students can learn by doing their own gardening. When she talks about her professional future, Leah reports plans to earn National Board Certification and often mentions a desire to take on additional roles, perhaps working with parents and the community.

Anthony. Anthony is one of the teachers interested in pursuing doctoral work in education while remaining in the classroom. Initially an undergraduate biochemistry and sociology double major, he had planned to enter the medical profession. However, after powerful experiences tutoring students, Anthony decided—against his family’s wishes—to shift his career path and make teaching his “vehicle for change.” He is now finishing his fourth year as a fifth-grade teacher and fulfilling a number of leadership and activist roles in his school and the community. Having concluded that “real change happens systemically,” Anthony has made a conscious effort to widen his sphere of influence—in particular, organizing fellow teachers around school-wide

issues. When asked about his future, Anthony offers a number of interests, including moving to another school if the administrative culture at his own does not improve, or working with like-minded friends/educators to open a teacher-led public school. Eventually, Anthony says he plans to enroll in a doctoral program, but wants to find a way to do so while still remaining connected to the community where he now works, and continuing to self-identify as a teacher first and foremost. He feels that a Ph.D. carries a degree of authority and, in anticipation of taking on more decision-making roles, says, “I want a way to back myself up.” His comments seem to indicate his belief that having a doctorate (and/or the experience it provides) will garner him more respect and support from other educational stakeholders. At one point, as an aside, Anthony also explained his interest in earning a doctorate as “the logical [next] step”—an interesting phrase echoed by others in our sample which merits scrutiny into which kind of logic he and others rely on as they consider their careers.

Anthony’s story reveals the web of influences shaping individual teachers’ career decisions. His interest in school-wide change indicates a desire to extend his reach beyond the classroom. Anthony’s future plans to pursue a doctorate and help open or lead a school suggest a desire for the kind of autonomy and decision-making capability traditionally denied to teachers, particularly in low-performing schools (Ingersoll & Alsalam, 1997). Despite its need for hard-working, qualified and committed educators, the conditions at Anthony’s own school do not encourage new teachers’ long-term employment there: his comments about an unsupportive administration connect to studies of other teachers (Ingersoll, 2003; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Shen, 1997). Nevertheless, Anthony remains committed to the community where he works and hopes to continue teaching there while pursuing—at a graduate program or perhaps another

school—the kind of learning and professional opportunities that he seeks. No matter what career path he pursues, he believes the kind of educational change he seeks can best be accomplished from the locus of teacher.

Uncertains (6 of 15)

There are three sub-categories that comprise this category. One contains two teachers who report that they might eventually pursue careers in administration. Another contains two teachers who say they will leave the classroom soon in order to have families; because they find teaching so time-consuming, they believe it would be impossible to be an excellent teacher and an excellent parent simultaneously. The last sub-category contains two teachers who say they just cannot speculate on their futures, though when pressed they report they will probably not stay in classroom teaching forever.

Allison. Allison is one of two in our sample who loves teaching but believes she will leave teaching soon to have children of her own. After college, while working in a law firm, she realized that her favorite part of the day was when her boss's kids showed up and she would help them with homework; it occurred to her, she reports, that she would rather be on a playground with kids than in an office with adults. After two years in a second grade classroom teaching on an emergency credential (her Spanish fluency was needed), she entered Center X and has since been teaching for four years at the same school in which she student taught. Allison is content in her job: it offers collegial support and tremendous learning opportunities for her; the school (a different school from Anthony's) is well organized to promote productive relationships between teachers and students; she loves the kids; she enjoys team-teaching with other teachers; her principal shares her education philosophy. Yet, she believes that, because teaching is so labor-

intensive and time-consuming (she reports working ten hours a day, six days a week, and says that professional development—while valuable—takes up two weeks of her off-track “vacation” time), she cannot keep the same pace when she starts her own family: “This is my sixth year teaching and I’m still staying here until six o’clock at night, and that can’t last if I have kids.” She is not certain that it is fair to share a contract with another teacher—essentially teaching half-time—because she believes that sacrifices the kids. She therefore reports that soon, once she has worked off her school loans, she intends either to leave teaching while she spends some years raising her kids, or shift into work as a speech pathologist. Either way, she does not intend to exit urban education permanently:

On an opportunity-cost level, I’ve already invested many years of my young professional life building a foundation in education...so I definitely want to stay in education. Whether I’ll be a teacher, I don’t know if I’m convinced I’ll be a teacher. If it keeps going at this pace, definitely not. It’s too time-consuming and energy-draining.

There are several issues inside Allison’s example. One is that she finds teaching a satisfying career but—and we heard this from many—does not think she can keep up the intense work pace much longer. It seems that successful teaching in these schools requires an enormous commitment; this may be something that idealistic, dedicated urban teachers will supply but only for a limited time. Ultimately, many of these teachers burn out—not because they do not achieve success in their workplace but because they cannot keep up the intense pace (and because school principals sometimes overload new, energetic teachers with additional duties). A second issue is that Allison says she will not leave teaching until she has worked off her loan.⁹ Does this mean that she would already have left teaching if this financial incentive did not exist? Also, notice that Allison finds it hard to consider teaching at less than full-dedication: for her (and others said

this too), urban teaching is an all-or-nothing proposition. None can conceive of being successful at urban teaching without an extraordinary commitment to the work.

Leavers, a.k.a. Shifters (3 of 15)

One-fifth of our sample has made a decision to shift into new roles in urban education. Two teachers are entering doctoral programs, and one—who had previously earned an administrative master’s degree at UCLA—is becoming an administrator. We found three commonalities among these teachers. First, they are on the veteran end of our sample (one in the fourth year of teaching, one in the fifth, one in the sixth). This suggests that their decision is not idiosyncratic but is linked to having had some years in teaching already (The rest of our sample are more or less evenly distributed across the spectrum of years teaching). Huberman (1989, 1993) found a series of interlocking career cycles for teachers in Switzerland; he reported that after three-to-five years in teaching, most teachers began to “stabilize” and either became more activist in their work or reassessed their career choices. Our data confirm this, and suggest a developmental trajectory that has teachers considering a departure from teaching once they have moved past early survival and stabilization phases. While all fifteen of the teachers in our sample reported that they valued—to varying degrees and with caveats—their Center X experience, almost all also reported feeling overwhelmed and unprepared during their first year in the classroom and then emerging from the “survival phase” (Fuller & Bown, 1975) or “reality shock” (Veenman, 1984) during years two and three with increased confidence and classroom control. Accompanying those changes, these shifting teachers report desires to “widen [their] sphere of influence,” “pursue the next thing,” and/or consider a departure from teaching.

Second, these three shifters are at the far end of the continuum in terms of taking

on multiple roles in teaching. In other words, they have in the past, and/or are currently, engaged in many education roles aside from their teaching assignments (or their “primary role”). This pattern confirms a trend already identified in the larger population of Center X graduates in which it was found that those reporting they will stay in teaching until retirement take on an average of three roles, while those who report they will leave soon take on an average of six roles (Goode, Quartz, Barraza-Lyons, & Thomas, 2003). At first we speculated this might mean that teachers who were interested in more than “just teaching”—as evidenced by seeking out multiple roles—eventually feel compelled to leave teaching for other education work. But the data do not bear this out. Instead, it seems to suggest that these teachers, having already decided to leave the classroom, prepare for their next career phase by seeking out non-teaching or leadership experiences (two teachers reported taking on additional roles in order to strengthen their graduate school applications).

And third, the three shifters also share a common desire to return to UCLA for graduate studies. All three applied to UCLA programs (though not all were accepted). Perhaps this willingness to re-matriculate at their graduate—and in some cases also their undergraduate—university is part of a comfort-level with the familiar. Or perhaps this highlights one of the potential unintended outcomes of participation in a university-affiliated teacher education program: during their preservice experience, the curtain is drawn back to reveal for them the wide range of post-graduate career paths available in urban education.

Catalina. Catalina is one of the shifters soon to begin a doctoral program. She initially entered teaching, she says, partly because she hated school as a child:

When I was a little girl I remember going to school, waking up in the morning and forcefully trying to make myself sick so I wouldn't have to go to school. I remember being bullied and not

being treated fairly [because I was Latina and spoke Spanish and was always unhappy. School was always a place I didn't want to be. As I progressed to high school it was the same thing.

She reports wanting to be a teacher for Latino students like she was. In college she was further motivated by seeing so few Latinos at the university: "I remember going to college and looking at the percentages of Latino people in college, and I thought the numbers were really low—just a horrible percentage for the percentage of people that live in California...[I entered teaching because] I wanted those percentages to change." She has been teaching for five years in the school at which she student-taught. However, this year Catalina applied for and was accepted into two local Ed.D. programs and will leave teaching for graduate school at one of them in the fall. Catalina views working in education at the university level (as a teacher educator, or conducting minority outreach, or maybe doing research—she does not know) as a way to further realize her initial goal of helping more Latinos into college.

Interestingly, her prior and present experiences with Center X seem partly to have encouraged this career path. Because she attended a preparation program that stresses personal relationships among teacher candidates and teacher educators, and because Center X offers continued support and connections to its graduates, Catalina has participated in many relationships and activities which exposed her to dimensions of urban education other than K-12 teaching. Talking about her future plans, she named one of her professors (who remains a professional friend) and said, "I want to be just like [her]." (And it may not be coincidental that this professor does just what Catalina wants to do: work as a teacher educator, conduct minority outreach and do some research.) Two years ago Catalina was invited to co-teach a course for teacher candidates at Center X; she has been a Guiding Teacher for student teachers from Center X; she has taken on school-wide and district-wide leadership roles. There is a sense then—and

we return to this later—that Center X (consciously or not) may facilitate the shifting of some classroom teachers into other roles within urban education both because it exposes its graduates to other professional realms and because it offers, in the form of caring faculty (most of whom are ex-teachers themselves) who remain connected to graduates, concrete models of how such shifting is accomplished.

Jiao. Jiao’s story offers a second example of a teacher shifting roles within urban education. He is leaving the classroom for graduate school, but expects to work in urban education for the rest of his life. Although he values teaching and reflects on the importance of good teachers in his own biography, Jiao reports always having viewed teaching as a “stepping stone...even during [my teacher preparation] it was like, ‘I’m going to teach for a few years and then I’ll come out and get my doctorate and do something else.’” Consistent with that plan, he recently applied to and was accepted in an Ed.D. program which he will enter this fall. Jiao admires his school’s principal—a person with whom he reports having a close, supportive relationship—but does not wish to become an administrator himself. Instead, he believes that a district position working within curriculum and instruction will best position him to support teachers and students “at a macro level.”

Though, Jiao reports that he would have taken this path regardless, there are several aspects of teaching with which he expresses frustration. He describes the profession as “stagnant” concerning salary and status: “In the business world, you can always become an ‘associate-’ this and then you can become ‘vice-’ this and then ‘director.’ In teaching, you’re just a teacher.” He also laments the constant pressure of high-stakes testing: although he feels valued as a successful teacher within his school community, he says he cannot help internalizing a sense

of failure when his students do not do well on standardized achievement measures. However, this frustration in the classroom has not prevented Jiao from taking on leadership roles around the school (in fact, maybe it encouraged them), including starting and leading a popular teacher inquiry group and an after-school peer tutoring program. Jiao admits that some of the activities were initiated in order to build his resume for graduate school, but they are reported to have become overwhelmingly positive components of the school community.

Despite taking paths that lead them—at least for now—away from the classroom, Catalina, Jiao, and Natalia (who will fill an administrative post in the fall) appear faithful to their original reasons for entering the teaching profession. Their stories also suggest the importance of mentoring relationships and school leadership models. All three shifters have been fortunate enough to work with strong, supportive administrators who enabled and encouraged them to take on multiple roles and build skills that will no doubt serve them well in future leadership positions. Jiao’s story additionally suggests that intentions for taking on multiple roles—in this case, building a resume—are not nearly as important as outcomes: improvements for school community and teaching colleagues. These examples illustrate a need for dynamic, more fluid models of careers in urban education—models that acknowledge and avoid that what Jiao refers to as “stagnating” as a teacher.

Why Do these Teachers Think about Shifting?

Only three of the fifteen teachers report an unequivocal intent to stay in teaching as long as they are able. There are three other stayers, but they expressed in interviews (too tentatively, however, for us to categorize them as “uncertains”) that they may leave teaching temporarily and/or would not close off the possibility that they might shift into other kinds of education

work. This means that twelve of fifteen teachers are uncertain about how long they will teach. What can be said about those twelve teachers? We found six strands of reason for leaving or considering leaving the classroom, or moving into another education role—in others words, six kinds of reason for shifting. Though several of these reasons emerged as we told individual teachers' stories above, here we examine the following reasons for shifting or leaving across all twelve teachers:

- Am stagnating/idling
- To make a bigger impact; better achieve my initial goals
- It is time to get my doctorate (“logical step”)
- Family pressure
- I love teaching, but, ...
 - a) family
 - b) time consuming
 - c) not enough money
 - d) do not love my school, and therefore looking for something else.

These strands are not discrete; we found that all twelve teachers weave two or more of them together to account for their decisions to shift or move, or as they articulate their plans for the future.

Several teachers speak of having “plateaued,” and therefore find themselves “stagnating” or “idling.” Connected to this is that several teachers have come to believe that their initial reasons for entry can be better met if they shift into other realms of urban education. They have begun to believe that they should shift to other kinds of urban education work in order to effect greater change. Michelle says, “I’m starting to feel like [my contribution] has to go more than just 20 kids.” Jiao talks about feeling the need to “make some type of impact at a macro level.” These self-reports fit with various models of teacher development (Fuller & Bown, 1975; Huberman, 1989, 1993; Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon, 1998), and suggest at least two kinds of

consideration. One is that, as Huberman (1989, 1993) found, perhaps this is a temporary phase which, given some time, would lead into another cycle of professional growth, development, and satisfaction in teaching; Huberman's study reveals the stabilization phase but then reports that many teachers move *past* it, into subsequent cycles of experimentation/activism and then serenity/relational distance. Applying this notion of career cycles to our sample highlights the possibility that some of the shifters are experiencing genuine impatience but that—given time, some additional teaching roles, and different kinds of professional development—they would find new challenges and satisfactions without having to leave the classroom. Perhaps these teachers would benefit from support in how to be professionally patient and how to make use of multiple roles in teaching (for example, the garden project that helped “refresh” and “refocus” Leah) instead of leaving the classroom.

A second consideration, however, is that perhaps these Center X graduates are atypical teachers. For various reasons (their reasons for entering the profession, their so-called elite status as successful graduates from a top-ranked university's master's program, the apprenticeship opportunities Center X has offered them), several of them believe there is a “logic” which requires them to “move on to bigger things” (a phrase Anthony used). This notion of viewing doctoral work as a logical next step taps into an entire meaning system about what highly-trained, successful, dedicated urban educators are socialized to do after they have stabilized as early career teachers. It links to ways that Center X may tacitly (or not) encourage graduates to consider becoming teacher educators themselves, connects to family pressures for one's own talented children to be “more than just” classroom teachers, and may be in part a product of societal perceptions of teaching generally and urban teaching specifically. Does Center X in fact

attract or select teacher candidates who are often not satisfied to stay in the classroom? Does Center X socialize its candidates into considering teaching as “a stepping stone,” and then facilitate this shifting by offering graduates powerful and varied mentoring experiences and relationships? For some teachers, like Jiao, “yes” seems an appropriate response to these questions. For others, the answers are less obvious and more nuanced.

Family pressure is another potential force at work in the career development of these fifteen teachers. Four-fifths of the sample report that their families initially disapproved of their decisions to enter teaching, saying that family members thought teaching did not offer enough status or money. Of those twelve teachers, seven spoke explicitly about family members having preferred that they pursue careers in medicine, law, or engineering. In almost all cases, teachers reported that, once they were accepted into or graduated from the prestigious program at UCLA, or became financially independent, the parental disapproval eased. Though our sample is too small for anything even resembling conclusiveness, we suspect that family pressures around teaching are partly linked to cultural background. Three teachers described families who supported their decision to enter teaching: all three teachers were woman. Two of them are the only Whites in our sample; the third moved to the U.S. from Latin America as an adolescent and attributed her family’s respect for teaching to the value placed on education in her home country. Of the twelve teachers whose families did not support their decision to teach, four are male and eight are female; seven self-reported as Asian, three self-reported as Latino/a, and two self-reported as Other. What might this reveal? We suspect that families more typically approve of their daughters becoming elementary teachers than their sons. The data has us wondering if first-generation immigrant parents are less inclined to view teaching as fitting the individual mobility-

based American dreams they may have for their (hard-working, college-educated) children. We found that some families' religious commitments to social service provided tacit or explicit encouragement for their children to consider teaching in urban communities. Given the data limitations, though, these are currently just open questions.

Additionally, three of the four male teachers drew explicit connections between their families' emerging approval and their plans to pursue what their families viewed as 'bigger things'—leadership roles beyond the classroom, administrative positions, or further graduate study. One male teacher noted that his father considered teaching largely “a woman's role” but supported the idea of his son ultimately becoming a principal or superintendent. We speculate, therefore, that some of teachers who are considering shifting into doctoral programs or administrative jobs are influenced by intertwined family and societal pressures around norms of career success.

Almost all teachers report loving teaching, *but*: “I love teaching, but...” That “but” may not be surprising—how many people in any profession would report complete satisfaction?—but the descriptions which follow the conjunction are worth a look, in part because every description was articulated by multiple people. Two teachers say that because teaching is so time-intensive and so energy-draining they will leave the classroom when they have kids of their own. Several teachers report that they do not expect to be able to keep up this intense work pace for long, especially since they are no longer young and single. Some teachers also report that they do not make enough money to pay their bills or buy a house. Three teachers speak of the “opportunity cost” of having invested considerable time, money and lost income to become professional

teachers, and say this to suggest that, in fact, they have “settled” for teaching and would find it difficult to shift or leave education/teaching even if they wanted to.

Three of the fifteen teachers report that, though they remain committed to teaching, they are not enamored of their school situation and may look for a more amenable school. It is important to note that all three teach at the same school and attribute their dissatisfaction largely to the administrative approach to leadership and the resulting school culture. One teacher explains the situation as, “like walking on eggshells.” Another notes, “It’s very volatile working here.” All three report distrusting all but a few co-workers who are also good friends. At the same time, these teachers do mention a general desire for increased autonomy and higher salary respectively—a reminder of the complex interplay of factors that can potentially drive a teacher from one school to another. Nevertheless, their collective story connects to the larger body of literature documenting links between administrative support and teacher retention, for example, Ingersoll’s (2003) finding that poor administrative support accounts for almost half of teacher workplace dissatisfaction.

Tentative Conclusions: Deepening, Broadening, and Extending Careers in Urban Education

The data suggest that the majority of these teachers remain committed to their initial reasons for becoming urban teachers for social justice, and yet are actively considering new ways to meet those professional goals. Those initial reasons for entry include the following: to help kids (“I wanted to be with the kids. I want to be in the classroom, I wanted to have a greater impact on their lives.”), to be there for kids like themselves (“I remember going to college and looking at the percentages of Latino people [like me] in college, and I thought the numbers were really low, just a horrible percentage for the percentage of people that live within California.”),

to offer high quality learning opportunities for low-income children (“At first I cried all the time for these kids and their situations—wanting to be the one to fix it, and realizing that I wasn’t going to fix it for them, but I could show them what they could do to fix it and to empower themselves.”), to be around children learning (“Working with kids and seeing the light bulbs [go on]...the brilliance of kids just in itself, and having a chance to develop this critical consciousness [with them].”), or to change the world (“I think of martyrs who fought in my country, who fought in the name of social justice...[I want to help] under-represented people succeed in society.”).

Just about all the teachers report—to varying degrees—that their teacher preparation program gave shape and language to their initial reasons for entry, hooked them up with like-minded colleagues, and strengthened their professional commitments. However, the majority of our sample report that they will not remain in teaching until retirement. We believe education needs a frame for careers in urban education that does not bemoan these teachers as “leavers” but rather supports them as “shifTERS.” Urban education has not necessarily lost them; instead, it appears to be gaining new professionals who will take their initial goals, their preparation and classroom experience and, with the right kinds of support and continued education, further improve urban teaching, urban education, and urban teacher development either from outside the classroom or in ways that might ultimately return them to the classroom.

For the reasons presented in this paper, many of these teachers no longer believe their personal-professional goals are served by working in urban classrooms, and so they are considering or pursuing other kinds of education work. As already mentioned, Center X appears to have played a role in the decision of several teachers to look outside the classroom for

professional satisfaction. Since Center X exposes students and graduates to multiple aspects of teacher education and urban education work, and since it offers rich opportunities for, and—in the cases of many faculty—actual examples of what it looks like to shift into graduate school and then university work. Center X and/or UCLA may be inadvertently grooming its graduates for short-term careers as teachers and longer-term careers in teacher education, administration or other kinds of urban education work. This deserves closer consideration.

The fact that the majority of the teachers in our study like working at the schools in which they teach is significant given the increased attention to issues of organizational characteristics in retaining teachers at high-poverty schools (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2000; NCTAF, 2003). In particular, job dissatisfaction and lack of administrative support are known to be major contributors to teacher turnover (Ingersoll, 2002, 2003; Shen, 1997). Why, then, do most of the teachers in this study (twelve out of fifteen) seem to buck the trends? We think most have been able to find schools compatible with both their professional preparation and their reasons for entry.

According to Johnson and Birkeland (2003), teachers report most satisfaction when their schools are organized to support teachers' success with students. This is true for the twelve teachers in our study who like working where they do; all twelve report mostly positive attributes about their school contexts, including the presence of friends and like-minded peers, opportunities to collaborate and take on multiple roles, and relatively supportive administrations. Despite feeling satisfied overall, however, teachers do report areas where they might like to see improvements. Some express a desire for better school-site mentorship and more interaction with experienced teachers (who may or may not exist in large numbers given the distribution of

teachers across schools).¹⁰ Three teachers in a particular school describe a competitive peer culture in which no one ever admits to making mistakes and, “everyone is trying to outdo everyone else” in order to appear aligned with the school’s philosophy of teaching and learning.

If, as these examples suggest, aspects of organizational health do matter, how did the majority of our teachers end up at generally “healthy” urban schools? How is it that three of these four school contexts seem to mostly satisfy the teachers who work there? There are a number of potential explanations, two of which have to do with the concept of “fit.” Because Center X works closely with students and partner schools and becomes very familiar with both, Center X faculty “know”—to a certain degree—how to match students and schools for a good fit. Some faculty advisors are even current or former administrators at partner schools, as is the case for two schools in our sample. These individuals are particularly well-positioned to prepare teacher candidates to work well at their schools (for example, encourage particular conceptions of teacher collaboration, or student learning) or even recruit teacher candidates from their own seminars whom they feel would fit successfully into their schools. At the same time, teacher candidates, having observed and/or student-taught in the partner schools, have opportunities to distill for themselves which schools will best suit their preferences. No doubt these mechanisms at programmatic and personal levels increase the likelihood of a good fit between teacher candidates and the schools in which they ultimately choose, and are chosen, to work.

Given a look at these fifteen teachers’ stories, we see that one emergent challenge is framing and supporting careers in urban education without tacitly relegating the urban teaching profession to a lower rung on the career ladder. Next year, all fifteen teachers in our sample will continue their work in education, but three will have left the classroom, and more will likely

follow. Although the terms “stayer” and “leaver” may offer an important lens for thinking about teacher retention, they do not do justice to many of the teachers in our sample. We believe that the existence of “shifting” requires a new career frame which is more inclusive of the multiple professional roles that urban educators adopt “in [their] efforts to further social justice, change the world, and work in communities that are in the most desperate need for highly-qualified educators” (Goode et al., 2003, p. 19).

After all, when one considers the US Bureau of Labor Statistics’ (2002) estimation that currently employed Americans can expect to change jobs—possibly even careers—five to seven times over the course of their lifetime, it is all the more impressive that these urban educators hope and plan to stay in the field of urban education for the remainder of their professional careers. In today’s world, it is rare for any individual to work at the same job for twenty or thirty years, as was the case only a generation ago. Our findings illustrate that many highly trained early career teachers seem to feel the need to leave teaching in order to continue pursuing their urban education goals. Instead of being pulled away or pushed out, we believe that more teachers they might be retained if there are ways for them to adopt alternative roles as career urban educators still connected in part to classrooms: taking sabbaticals, sharing teaching duties while taking on additional education work, mentoring new teachers in the schools where they teach, working as administrators who teach. The possibilities are both numerous and promising.

It is, however, with trepidation that we call for a new conceptualization of urban careers in education. We understand the adverse effects that shifters—regardless of where they go or what kind of educational work they shift into—have on schools’ organizational health (Ingersoll, 2002, 2003; NCTAF, 2003). We also understand that enabling and encouraging such shifting

carries the potential to further degrade the teaching profession and reinforce notions of teaching as a “stepping stone” to more “elite” careers in education. Without question, urban schools need excellent teachers, but they also need excellent school leaders, district-level administrators, educational researchers, and teacher educators—all of whom must be specially trained to both recognize and enable successful teaching for students in urban schools. We hope this new frame can be constructed in way that will ultimately encourage and enable these teachers to simultaneously pursue other interests and expand their professional horizons while they remain directly connected to and in contact with students, thus fulfilling their desired “complementary hyphenated roles as school and program leaders, curriculum developers, mentors, staff developers, teacher educators, and researchers while they remain teachers” (Darling-Hammond, 1997).

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Table 1: Demographic Breakdown of the Fifteen Informants

Sample of teachers (n=15)	Total	15				
	By gender	Male			Female	
		4			11	
	By Ethnicity	Asian	Latino/a	White	Other	
		7	4	2	2	
	By years teaching	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
4		3	4	3	1	

Table 2: Current Career Status of Participating Teachers (n=15)

	Stayers <i>Planning to stay in classroom teaching long-term (but with various caveats)</i> (6)	Uncertains <i>Cannot speculate, or intend to teach a while longer and then probably shift into another education role</i> (6)	Leavers (a.k.a. Shifters) <i>Shifting out of the classroom and into new education roles</i> (3)
2 Years Teaching	• Jasmine • Mei	• Karina • Mike	
3 Years Teaching	• Anthony • Maeve	• Michelle	
4 Years Teaching	• Leah	• Kyuhei • Allison	• Jaio
5 Years Teaching	• Elizabeth	• Christina	• Catalina
6 Years Teaching			• Natalia

Notes

¹ Questions about what constitutes a “qualified” teacher and “quality” teaching remain unresolved and the subject of great debate. Although teacher quality is a critical issue inherently related to teacher retention, it is not the focus of this paper. Our data would not support such an analysis. For clarity (and not for endorsement), all references in this paper to qualified and/or highly qualified teachers should be interpreted along the No Child Left Behind guidelines. Underqualified teachers, therefore, include those who would not meet federal and state guidelines. The term specially-trained teachers will be used to denote our sample participants who have undergone specific preparation for teaching in high priority urban schools.

² This description of Center X comes from ideas fleshed out in other work. For more discussion of the origins and contours of teacher education at UCLA, see Quartz, Olsen, & Duncan-Andrade (in press) or Olsen et al. (in press).

³ Center X prepares for and partners with elementary, middle, and high schools, however for reasons of consistency we chose to limit this study to elementary teachers only.

⁴ As part of the larger project on urban teaching, we had access to a large survey database on hundreds of TEP graduates. We used that database to identify and select participants.

⁵ And most of the parents of these Asian and Latino teachers are first-generation immigrants, having moved to California within the last few decades.

⁶ All teacher names are pseudonyms.

⁷ This analysis focuses predominantly on the teachers as more or less individual actors. In doing this we have sometimes subordinated context-based or cultural examinations which might highlight school influences, or larger sociocultural dimensions shaping the teachers’ perspectives and choices. We do not intend to ignore organizational influences or treat teachers as unfettered, autonomous selves, but believe this present analytical slice into the data is a valuable one.

⁸ But self-reports here may be a bit misleading, as choosing to say one is going to stay in teaching as long as possible might be a dispreferred move given that informants know they are talking to ex-teachers now-academics conducting research. Consider Goffman’s (1959) “impression management.”

⁹ California currently has a grant program which loans money to teacher candidates for program tuition and living expenses and then forgives the loan once teachers work for five years in hard-to-staff California schools. Allison said that the grant money is a factor in her decision-making, but “a consideration...not a restriction.”

¹⁰ Johnson and Birkeland (2003) describe schools in which veteran teachers work alongside novice teachers in meaningful ways as *integrated professional cultures*—a desirous situation though one which, in urban Los Angeles at least, may be rare given the fact that high-poverty schools like the four in our sample tend to have more beginning and/or uncertified teachers and fewer qualified and experienced teachers (NCTAF, 2003; Carroll, Reichardt, Guarino, & Mejia, 2000). For example, at one of the four schools in our sample, more than half of the teachers are in their first and second year of teaching, two thirds of the staff have three or less years teaching experience and one quarter do not hold full certification.

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