The Fragility of Urban Teaching:

A Longitudinal Study of Career Development and Activism

Retention Report Series: A Longitudinal Study of Career Urban Educators

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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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Teacher educators at UCLA have been struggling over the past decade—guided by a strong commitment to social justice—to make their work responsive to the needs of high-poverty urban schools.   Their intention is to prepare teachers as change agents who will work with local communities to help improve the conditions of schooling. In this chapter, we describe the creation and development of UCLA's Urban Teacher Education Program in Center X. Specifically, we focus on its effort to partner with local communities to create alternative sites of learning for novice teachers. We then share a story of Center X graduates working in one Los Angeles elementary school in order to set the stage for our research question: under what conditions do highly-qualified urban teachers remain committed to a career as a social justice educator? We report preliminary retention data from a longitudinal study of Center X graduates, and explore the issue of how professional learning communities emerge in urban schools. The chapter closes with an analysis of the fragility of urban teaching.

Center X: Where Research and Practice Intersect for Urban School Professionals

Center X was first conceived in 1992 as a result of the upheaval and self-examination stemming from Los Angeles' Rodney King verdict uprisings. In 1994, Center X began as an integrated, experimental, two-year urban teacher preparation program in the Graduate School of Education & Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles (See Oakes, 1996). Previously, UCLA's teacher education program was a highly regarded but conventional one-year M.Ed. program that prepared teachers by emphasizing constructivism and practitioner reflection. The newly formed

Center X–named as such to highlight experimentation and the intersection of theory and practice–put forward an activist commitment to social justice, grounded itself in sociocultural learning theory, and embedded teacher apprenticeship inside urban school community partnerships. Teacher preparation was reconceptualized as dialogical inquiry and guided social practice about what it means to be a transformative social justice educator in urban Los Angeles.[1]

The new program recruited diverse groups of faculty and teacher candidates interested in social change, put students and instructors in small learning teams, and extended the M.Ed. program through a scaffolded, "resident" year of full-time teaching after the novice year. Center X began small, graduating 90 teachers in each of its first two years, and has slowly grown to twice that size. The Center X curriculum stresses views of inequity as structural, activism as necessary, multiculturalism as central, and the critical study of race and society as crucial in order to prepare teachers to teach successfully for social justice in urban schools. 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 now likely to engage around notions of sociocultural theories of learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978), asset mapping (Blasi, n.d.; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993), funds of knowledge (Moll, 1988, 1998), language acquisition (Cummins, 1996) and cultural identity (McIntosh, 1998; Tatum, 1997). Candidates

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[1] In this chapter, "social justice educators" is meant to refer to teachers who see their work as part of a broader agenda for social change and justice—one that embodies

participate in inquiry sessions, curriculum design and teaching projects in schools,

classrooms and community centers with groups of peers, K-12 students, professors and

veteran teachers.   This set of ideas and practices has become the program. For the sake

of our discussion here, we have selected three Center X perspectives to illuminate some

of the contours of the program:

> • An emphasis on social justice

> • A social theory of learning

> • Teacher preparation as integrated whole, occurring over time, in context.[2]

An emphasis on social justice.

Center X is committed to preparing teachers as agents of social change. Given this, the

program foregrounds social justice. Ideas and readings from the following related

domains informed the creation of the program, and guide the program's practices still:

multiculturalism (Banks, 1994; Darder, 1998; Nieto, 1999), critical pedagogy (Freire,

1970; Giroux, 1992; hooks, 1994; McLaren, 1997), culturally responsive teaching

(Cochran-Smith, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Oakes & Lipton, 2002; Sleeter, 1993), and

community organizing (Alinsky, 1989). Center X has adopted a view of teaching that

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activism and active engagement with communities.

[2] The principles which guide this program are discussed in Oakes (1996). They are these:
(1) Embody a social justice agenda; (2) Treat professional education "cradle-to-grave;"
(3) Collaborate across institutions and committees; (4) Focus simultaneously on
professional education, school reform, and reinventing the university's role in K-12
schooling; (5) Blend research and practice; (6) Bring together educators' and students'
needs for depth of content knowledge, powerful pedagogies,, and school cultures that

moves participants outside traditional frames of classrooms into larger examinations of

societal inequity and conditions of schooling. The program links macro perspectives of

society (coming from sociology, cultural anthropology and political science) to

microanalyses of students, schools and classrooms (including student motivation,

tracking, and curriculum design). Through participation in team seminars, candidates use

theory and research to create curricula that integrate learning goals with students' homes

and communities. The goal of these curricula is to raise students' awareness and

therefore empower K-12 students to identify and challenge inequity at the same time they

learn the skills and academics of their school's official curriculum.

Center X also attempts to build partnerships with their urban school communities,

having decided after a few years to partner only with high poverty, hard-to-staff schools

in low-income urban neighborhoods—those Los Angeles communities most in need of

highly qualified teachers. Center X teams often hold their seminars at the local schools,

not on the university campus. As part of the coursework during their first year,

candidates complete a Community Project in which they form groups to investigate the

particular community in which they will student teach: they identify and map community

assets; interview parents and other community members; research the history,

demographics and culture of the neighborhoods; and present findings in portfolios,

community presentations and action plans. Second year students–now full-time

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enable serious and sustained engagement in teaching and learning; and (7) Remain self-
renewing.

teachers–enter partner schools in pairs or small groups and work closely with veteran teachers and Center X faculty to continually embed social justice in their practice.

These community partnerships are still a work-in-progress and represent one of the Center's toughest struggles. It has proved difficult to dislodge vestiges of the traditional hierarchy of university-school (or expert-subject) relations; full buy-in from communities and district administrators has proved elusive; Center X personnel can be constrained by holding perspectives different from schools and communities; charges of ivory tower elitism linger; and many Center X teachers report a wide gap separating university conceptions and L.A. school realities, finding it hard to build pedagogical bridges between them.

Finally, Center X attempts to guide its own practice with social justice principles. With varying success, the program recruits diverse groups of students and faculty. Center X's professional development faculty committee has led a faculty workshop on racism. The program recently became involved with the Freire Institute on campus. By no means perfectly democratic, Center X favors collaborative decision-making, a flattened hierarchy, and governance by committee. These components allow the program to try and remain self-renewing and responsive to students' needs and the needs of the school communities.

A social theory of learning

Conceiving of learning as embedded firmly inside students' and teachers' social interactions and contexts, the program embraces sociocultural learning perspectives

(Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Cummins, 1996; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Moll, 1988, 1998;

Vygotsky, 1978). Many in Center X believe that learning is largely acculturation (Oakes,

1996) and, as such, emerges from the multiple identities, interpretations, purposes, prior

experiences and combined perspectives that any group of people relies on in a collective

endeavor like schooling. Given this cultural and community view, Center X faculty

attempt to merge pedagogy with relationships through collaborative learning,

apprenticeship models of teaching, and assessment embedded inside authentic activities.

Faculty try to locate teacher development not in the university lecture hall but in the

schools and communities in which their teachers work. This stance leads Center X to

instruct its own candidates in the same ways it urges candidates to conduct their own

teaching: in teams and using inquiry and dialogue as primary pedagogical tools.

Because purposefully thoughtful teachers need a firm grounding in the research and

theory which guide their pedagogies, learning theory is a cornerstone of the curriculum.

To evaluate candidates, the program relies on authentic forms of assessment such as

collaborative projects, portfolios, ongoing conversation, and field supervisors as teaching

coaches. Candidates participate in inquiry-based courses such as "Cultural Identity" and

"Social Foundations and Cultural Diversity in American Education," and they choose one

of three cultures of emphasis (African American, Latino, or Asian American) for an

inquiry group linking culture, curriculum, and pedagogy.

    The sociocultural principles that prepare teachers for classroom work also guide

Center X efforts to create teacher learning communities in schools. Center X often

recruits its new faculty from partner districts. Center X maintains close working

relationships with like-minded teachers and administrators from the schools with whom

Center X partners, using those relationships to re-create schools as productive places of

collaboration and inquiry toward social change. However, as Lane, et al (2003) reported,

it has been difficult to find large numbers of school personnel whose education

philosophies match that of Center X.

Teacher preparation as integrated whole, occurring over time, in context

Because Center X takes a holistic view of teachers and teaching, the program stresses

teacher preparation as the simultaneous development of teacher identities and supportive

teacher communities. Pre-service teachers learn their craft and professional dispositions

within this holistic environment of teachers, teaching, and communities. Center X is a

collection of several undertakings that support urban teacher development: the Subject

Matter Projects (a set of state-wide professional development centers), the Teacher

Education Program, and several research and outreach efforts which link empirical

analyses of urban schooling with attempts to widen and deepen the Center's work. These

units are more or less independent of one another, but significant coherence results from

their subscribing to the Center X "principles" (introduced in a footnote earlier in this

chapter.)

Students remain in the same team (of usually 18 candidates) for two years, and

typically have the same faculty advisor as team leader for both years. This enables team

leaders and students to develop relationships that personalize the preparation process and

attend to frequently neglected aspects of professional development, including moral, political, social, and affective dimensions of becoming a career urban educator. The faculty tends to place the daily exigencies of classroom challenges (pedagogy, student-teacher-classroom relationships, curriculum, etc.) in the context of open themes like the social justice implications of practice; the teacher's respectful participation in helping students construct knowledge; the unspoken, ignored, or unintended lessons about themselves and society that students learn; and so on. Students (and faculty) are often frustrated to find that these dialogues do not produce firm answers—that it is the constructive participation itself that may, ultimately, be most liberating and productive. That said, however, such practices can be deeply unnerving (Bird, et al, 1993).

The program has adopted an iterative view of teacher development, believing that its preservice candidates and inservice graduates should continually revisit the principles of practice Center X promotes. During the novice year, students grapple with the perspectives and issues (already described) that the program foregrounds; during the resident year, Center X faculty guide residents in another cycle of reflection on these notions which are now embedded in their full-time teaching practice. These investigations take place as the teachers continue to meet in teams and prepare their master's portfolios. Once they graduate, the beginning teachers are invited into the Urban Educator Network (UEN)—a series of professional development opportunities, inquiry groups and networks created in order to establish additional sites of collaborative practice for teachers within the school-university partnerships. For example, one component of the network is CIRCLE (the Consortium of urban schools Involved in

Renewal and Committed to Leadership in Education), a set of district-based groups of

teachers, administrators, university faculty and community leaders who meet quarterly to

strategize ways to better integrate school, district, and university. Another UEN effort,

Critical Teacher Inquiry Groups for Growth and Retention, brings activist-minded

teachers from a school together to collaborate on ways to continually embed social justice

in their teaching practice; this UEN effort is featured later in this chapter.

Although those who participate in UEN activities find them helpful, often

invaluable (Quartz et. al, 2003), only a few dozen teachers participate regularly. And,

even though some non-Center X teachers participate, the groups are sometimes perceived

as closed-door UCLA enclaves. Moreover, as Center X has grown, its view of

professional development for graduates has had to change: with over 700 graduates, the

goal of reaching all graduates has been replaced with the more research-oriented goal of

understanding how best to establish successful and continual professional development in

urban schools. At their best, these development structures act as collective

apprenticeship. In this way, Center X attempts to support urban teachers to build activist

communities at their teaching sites; consider themselves school leaders and coalition

builders as well as teachers; and work to become public intellectuals. The program does

not always succeed, but remains committed to trying.

We turn now to one example of teachers struggling together to find hope and

energy amid the considerable challenges they face each day. This example is not

intended to represent the complexity or richness of teaching in urban schools. Instead, it

provides a context for the type of meaningful professional development and classroom

practice that is possible in urban schools.

The social justice educators at Power Elementary[3]

> Today was an almost unbearably sad day at school...not sure if you've
> heard...interesting in light of our email exchange yesterday: according to my
> students (all of which were SOBBING this morning when I arrived) two young
> men (black) were sitting in a car yesterday afternoon...some men in a car rolled
> up, got out and shot one in the eye (his head exploded) there was a 3month old in
> the back seat (she was left "unharmed") the other got out and ran (they call him
> "baby" Marcus) the guys ran after him and shot him in the back and then more
> when he fell...both men dead, the perpetrators (known by the way) got away,
> drove around doing donuts in front of folks' homes, and laughing about the
> incident...the nephew of one is in my class, the brother of the other is in Mr. [R's]
> class. This is a close community so word spread pretty rapidly yesterday. I called
> for a community circle this morning, and for an hour and a half the kids all just
> talked and cried. I felt ill-equipped to handle a crisis like this (on such a grand
> scale) but, we got through it...i said as little as possible, i cried with the kids, we
> all consoled each other, and others began sharing different stories of violence and
> loss... in the end, i did what i thought (and hope) was best... tried to empower
> them with the belief that they must work to become the warriors who combat the
> senseless violence and madness on the streets. i also gave them some "street
> lessons": walk against traffic, don't sit in parked cars chillin' with your friends, be
> vigilant, check your surroundings, etc. etc. We're making cards, and going to send
> a little money to the families... and the kids all seem to feel a little better.... how
> would you handle this? It looks as if many teachers didn't say or do
> much...feeling a bit weary today...[Ms. Grant]

This email correspondence reveals just one of the intense challenges facing teachers in

high poverty urban schools. One way UCLA has tried to support teachers facing these

challenges is through critical teacher inquiry groups like the one based at Power

Elementary School in Watts, a community in South Central Los Angeles. The group

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[3] For a fuller analysis of this data, see Duncan-Andrade (2003).

came together to support colleagues committed to developing as social justice educators

(see Oakes and Lipton, 2002). Seven teachers participate in the seminar, at least one

from every grade except first. A UCLA teacher educator facilitates the group. They

meet twice a month after school in Mr. Roberts' classroom to discuss a set of shared

readings on social and educational theory (see attached syllabus), to review and offer

critical feedback on video from their classroom practice, and to organize their long-term

objectives for the group. The selection of readings, and the discussions that emanate out

of them, are in keeping with the spirit of critical pedagogy (see Freire, 1970; Shor, 1992)

and critical education theory (see Darling-Hammond, 1998; Morrow & Torres, 1995;

Valenzuela, 1999).

One example of the power resting in these types of teacher development groups

came in December 2002, during the group's discussion of long-term goals. Ideas floated

around about designing professional development seminars on social justice, forming

vertical teams and organizing a youth activists group on campus. The teachers seemed to

have equal interest in each of the ideas. At Ms. Grant's turn, she produced an *LA Times*

article titled, "City declares war on gangs" (*Los Angeles Times*, December 4, 2002), the

abstract of which reads:

> Mayor James K. Hahn and Los Angeles Police Chief William J. Bratton declared
> an all-out assault on the city's street gangs Tuesday, saying they will use the same
> tactics that crippled the Mafia to pursue gang leaders and members. Bratton on
> Tuesday called gang activity "homeland terrorism," warning that the city's street
> gangs are "the head that needs to be cut off".

She summarized the article and the intent of the new Los Angeles police chief to use profiling techniques to crack down on suspected gang members before they engage in violent behavior. This response from the police chief came at a time when Los Angeles was in national headlines with the nation's highest number of murders. The murder rate had gone over 600 in 2002, most occurring in South Central Los Angeles. At one point in late November, there were twelve straight days during which at least one person was shot and killed within an eight-block radius. Much of this killing was attributed to gang warfare, and much of this was happening in the neighborhoods surrounding Power Elementary School. The teachers in the group were acutely aware of the impact of these "ghettoized conditions" (Anyon 1999; Tabb, 1970) on their students and the school's failure to address the neighborhood's effects on students. Faculty were upset that the district-mandated strict adherence to state standards, a culturally irrelevant scripted reading program, and overemphasis on SAT-9 testing preparation did little to correct the school's long history of failing its 100% African American and Latino student population.

Ms. Grant explained that she had distributed copies of the article to her fourth grade students so that they could read it and discuss it as a class. The class discussion revealed that her students were unaware of the policies that were being put in place as measures to stop the violence. Ms. Grant was particularly concerned that the larger school community would be negatively affected by profiling measures that would become legally justified causes for police harassment. She was equally concerned that people who lived outside of the community were the ones designing the response to the

murders—a recipe for police insensitivity and increased tensions and hostility.

Ultimately, Ms. Grant believed that these policies would have a negative impact on her

students and the school. Having grown up in East Palo Alto in the mid-1980s, when it

was dubbed the murder capital of the nation, she witnessed the harmful impact of similar

policing measures aimed at curbing violence. By sharing her childhood experience, she

helped the group to understand that often times the remnants of such policies are feelings

of increased disenfranchisement shared between equally disempowered groups of people

that are hermetically sealed inside of impoverished communities.

The group was intrigued by her analysis and pushed her to share her intentions for

using the article in her class. Ms. Grant explained the process of sharing and discussing

the article about the killings and the response of elected officials to the situation as

culturally relevant critical pedagogy:

> Ms. Grant: We have to think of it like Freire for kids. We have to help our kids
> name their oppression first, before we can expect them to seek out liberation in
> any shape or form. So, to start talking about the killings in this way, to talk about
> how it's going to effect them and their families in ways like just them going to the
> corner store, is important here.

It is clear that for Ms. Grant, the process of critical pedagogy is not limited to issues

inside the walls of her classroom. To accomplish this process of critical inquiry, she first

engaged students in a lengthy discussion about the article and the impact such policies

would have on their lives. Then they wrote expository papers on gangs, offering

alternative methods for combating the proliferation of gangs and gang violence (such as

community policing and community led strategizing sessions to revisit the 1992 South

Central gang truce).

As Ms. Grant finished an impassioned discussion of the unit and her politics of pedagogy, it was clear that the dynamics of the discussion had been dramatically altered. Effectively, she had insisted that the group deal more explicitly with the larger social environment in which they were being asked to teach. Her colleagues responded enthusiastically with discussions about their own pedagogical efforts. These discussions revealed that four of the six participants had already been engaging their students in similar discussions about the killings, but none knew that the others were doing it. These types of critical professional discussions act as a key component for urban teachers collaborating as compañeras/os (sisters and brothers in struggle), pursuing an authentically caring (Valenzuela, 1999) and empowering critical pedagogy (Shor, 1992).

The group decided that one of the projects emerging from their community of practice would be a quarterly thematic newspaper, showcasing their students' work. The first issue would focus on critiquing popularized notions of gangs and gang members. They talked about lessons using this theme that would teach grade level standards and empower students to produce humanizing narratives about gang members as well as counter-narratives about their community. All six of the teachers present agreed to have their class take on at least one aspect of the production. Ms. Grant suggested that her class could take the lead on the newspaper, acting as the editors for submissions from any class in the school. Mr. Kinsman and Ms. Olson said that their 3rd grade classes would provide editorial submissions, along with translation services so that the paper's message could also reach Spanish speakers.

<u>Ms. Mok</u>

Ms. Mok was already dealing with similar issues with her 2nd graders because of recurring violent episodes in her students' lives. She shared this class discussion: A Latino boy was having trouble focusing and often drifted off. Another child said that the class needed to go into "community circle"[4] to discuss a pressing issue. When Ms. Mok invited students to talk about gunshots fired in their neighborhoods, roughly three-fourths of the class said that they heard shots from their homes; two said that their homes had been shot into. When asked, nearly all of the students knew someone who had been a victim of similar events. Through the community circle, the particularly troubled and distracted boy shared that his house had been sprayed with bullets a few nights before and now he was afraid he might die. In response to this conversation the class developed a survey for other students about school and community safety. Students used their math time to tally their findings and analyze the data.

These events provided scaffolding for Ms. Mok's students when she decided to follow Ms. Grant's lead and use the *LA Times* article as a discussion piece with her class as well. This dovetailed into larger class discussions about the politics of public portrayals and stereotyping, culminating in Ms. Mok's class writing letters to the mayor requesting that he rethink policies that promote profiling as a police practice. These letters received a quick response letter along with an autographed picture from the mayor, both of which were displayed in the main office.

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[4] Community circle brings students in Ms. Mok's class together in a circle to discuss issues and problems pertinent to their lives.

Mr. Truong and Mr. Ballesteros

Mr. Truong's fifth grade class partnered with Mr. Ballesteros' Kindergarten class to address issues of profiling in the community. Mr. Ballesteros began his unit by having his students draw portraits that represented their ideas of gang members. On a later day, he asked students to draw self-portraits. Many of the images were similarly stereotypical of urban youth (portraits of dark hued characters with baggy clothes and baseball caps on sideways or beanies) save the weaponry that was often attached to their images of gang members. To further emphasize the power of stereotyping, Mr. Ballesteros asked students to describe the attire that gang members could be expected to wear. Students shouted out similar descriptions to those found in their drawings, many of which could easily be ascribed to large numbers of urban youth (baggy jeans, baggy shirts, baseball cap, sneakers). To problematize his students' thinking, Mr. Ballesteros brought two students, one Chicano male and one African American male, from Mr. Truong's class to the front of the room—these two regularly served as peer tutors in the class. Mr. Ballesteros and Mr. Truong recounted what happened next:

> Mr. Ballesteros: So, I asked my students. Are these two young men gang members then? And my students yelled out, "No!" So, I asked them to look back at their descriptions of gang members, and pretty much all the things they listed off, baggy jeans, big t-shirts, baseball hats, were on your two students. Then some of them started to change, I mean to say "yes" that they were gang members.

> Mr. Truong: Yeah. Man, they [my two students] were pissed off. They came back to my class saying how messed up it was that kids thought they were in gangs.

Mr. Ballesteros: Yeah, but it's weird because my kids were really stuck. I mean they knew that they weren't gang members, but then they fit the description.

Mr. Ballesteros saw clear value in asking kindergartners to question dominant narratives. For the two fifth graders in Mr. Truong's class, the experience provided two powerful moments for sharing their perspectives on dominant images of urban males of color. One of these moments came when they described the experience to their own peers in Mr. Truong's class, the other when they returned to Mr. Ballesteros' Kindergarten class to tell students how they were personally hurt by their stereotypes.

From support to retention—"A national crisis"

Many urban teachers experience the kind of painful consequences of poverty and violence that Ms. Grant shared in her e-mail. Few, however, have the necessary support to deal with these consequences in the constructive, educative way that Ms. Grant proposed to her colleagues. Together, these social justice educators helped one another see their practice as an integrated, coherent whole. Together, they engaged students across grade-levels and classrooms in critical, probing analyses of an important social issue. Together they read and discussed social theory and the values that ground culturally relevant critical pedagogy.   Together, they are creating a professional culture that rewards collegiality that promotes challenging discussions about matters relevant to effective teaching in high poverty schools. Creating this culture should be a natural extension of the work of rigorous pre-service programs—like Center X—that are

committed to furthering social justice. With supportive learning communities teachers in

high-poverty schools have a shot at beating the one-in-five odds that they will abandon

their school or teaching completely at the end of the year.[5]

Teacher retention—as opposed to the teacher shortage—has been called "a

national crisis" (National Commission for Teaching and America's Future, 2003). It is a

crisis most acutely felt in urban, high-poverty schools where the annual turnover rate is

almost a third higher than the rate for all teachers in all schools (NCTAF, 2003). High

attrition within these "hard-to-staff" schools is perpetuated by abysmal working

conditions, high percentages of new, inexperienced, often uncredentialled, teachers, and

revolving leadership. As the National Commission for Teaching and America's Future

(2003) advocates, we have the best hope of breaking this cycle of urban teacher attrition

by "finding a way for school systems to organize the work of qualified teachers so they

can collaborate with their colleagues in developing strong learning communities that will

sustain them as they become more accomplished teachers."

Center X seeks to set these strong learning communities in motion through its

urban teacher education program, as detailed above. When they graduate, Center X-

educated teachers report as very valuable the following programmatic emphases:

viewing practice through the lens of theory; creating supportive networks of like-minded

peers; and viewing cultural and linguistic diversity as strengths. Overall, graduates leave

the program feeling very confident in their abilities to become an effective teacher, enact

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[5] This figure is based on NCES 2000-01 SASS/TFS annual teacher turnover data, as reported in
Richard M. Ingersoll, "Teacher Turnover and Teacher Shortages: An Organizational Analysis,"

socially just practices, teach empowering curriculum, and design appropriate and challenging lesson plans. As Figure 1 illustrates, Center X graduates are also considerably more diverse than the teaching workforce, which in general bears little resemblance to the characteristics of urban students.

Figure 1: Ethnicity of Center X Students/Graduates, 1995-2003 (n=913)
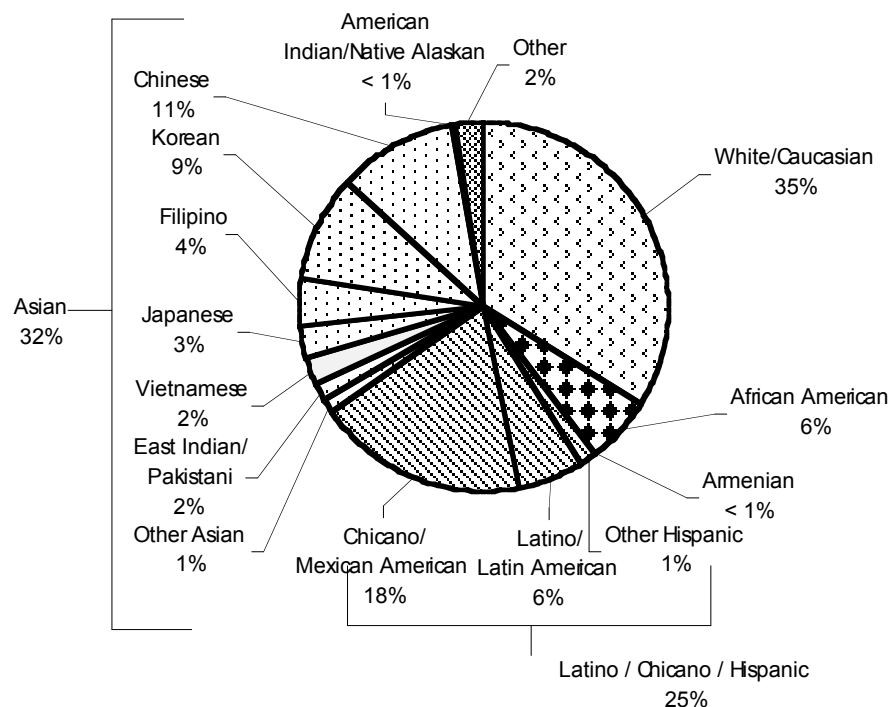
An ideal research context

As a research sample, the Center X graduates represent the population of highly qualified, diverse, and committed urban educators reformers clamor for. If these teachers can't be retained, who can? In our initial analysis of Center X's graduates (Quartz, et al.,

American Educational Research Journal, 38 (fall 2001), pp. 499-534.

2003), we wondered whether our retention figures would confirm research findings that early career teachers considered by many to be "the best and the brightest" are the ones most likely to leave. Several studies, for instance, show that 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). Our sample is, however, somewhat unique. While Center X graduates all earn advanced degrees, complete subject-based undergraduate degrees, and have high test scores, they also define themselves as urban educators. 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. They also receive specialized training to teach in these schools. Perhaps, therefore, we should not be surprised if Center X graduates are retained; we should be disturbed if they leave.

The story unfolds after graduation when these highly qualified social justice educators disperse; by 2002, Center X's 417 graduates taught at more than 140 schools across and beyond Los Angeles. We are in the midst of a longitudinal study to track these graduates and their career development. At the end of the study, we will have nine cohorts of graduates, in their first through tenth year of teaching, and we will use discrete time survival mixture analysis to understand the conditions under which these graduates

are retained in urban schools. At this point, however, our preliminary findings help to

frame the current policy debate surrounding urban teacher retention.

As expected, Center X graduates stay in teaching at much higher rates than the

national average, but many do leave. To better capture the career trajectories of

graduates, we distinguish in our survey data, between leaving the classroom and leaving

education. Typically, attrition is defined as leaving teaching.[6] Although we agree that

it's crucial to track the retention of full-time classroom teachers, we also think it's

important to expand the definition of retention to include those educators who have left

full-time classroom teaching for other professional roles. Interestingly, as Table 1

summarizes, the move to leave education seems to stabilize after four years while the

exodus from the classroom accelerates. What lies between these two pathways may help

explain part of the puzzle of retaining urban teachers.

*Table 1: Beginning Teacher Attrition: Center X Graduates Compared to National Averages*

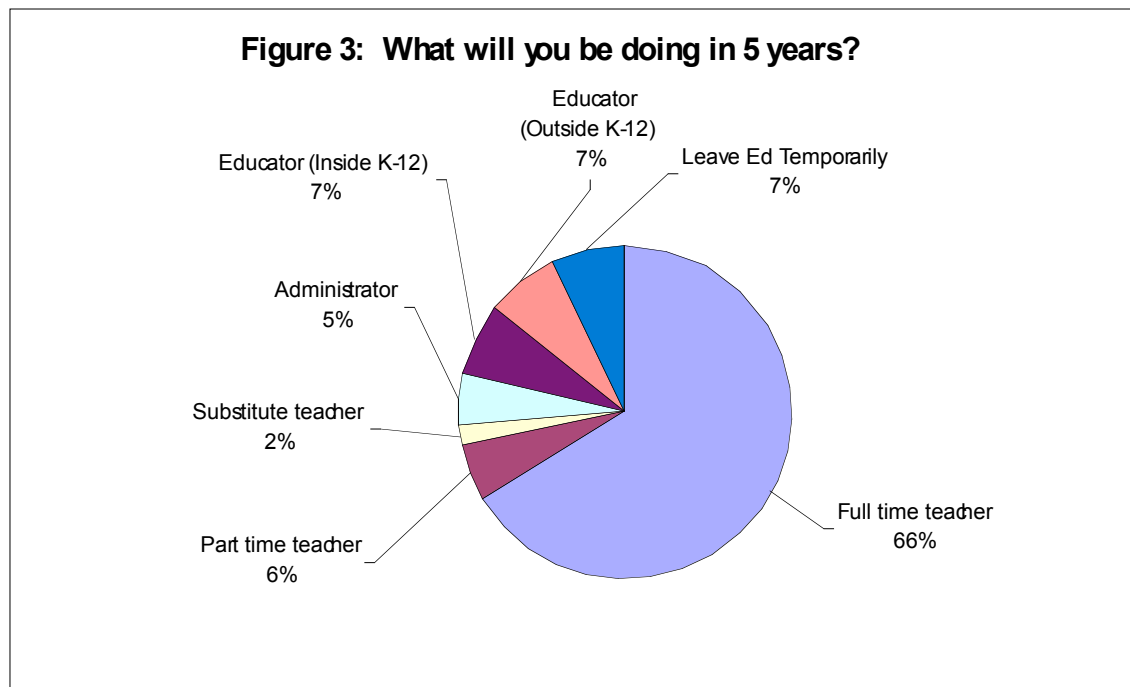|	Center X Graduates (1997-2001)		Nation-wide SASS/TFS (2000-2001) Left teaching
	Left classroom	Left education	

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[6] This category certainly includes full-time classroom teachers but it may also extend beyond the classroom to capture teachers on special assignments, coordinators, or others. We are currently investigating how other retention studies define a retained teacher.

After 2 years	3%	1%	24%
After 3 years	5%	1%	33%
After 4 years	21%	11%	40%
After 5 years	24%	12%	46%
After 6 years	37%	10%	----

Looking across Center X's first five cohorts of graduates, 94% remain in education and of these educators 86% are still full time classroom teachers. The remaining 14% take on a variety of roles, as displayed in figure 2.

Figure 2: Primary Roles of Retained Educators
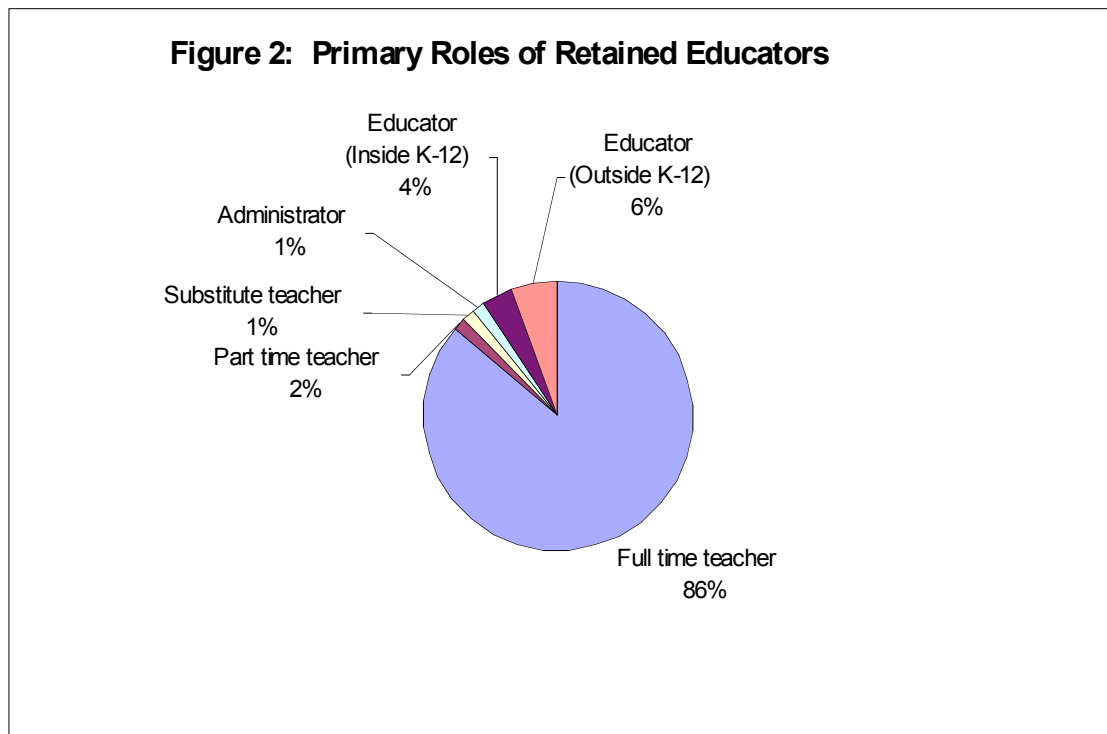
Looking at the "Educator (Inside K-12)" category, we find an interesting variety of roles including: BTSA (Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment) Coordinator, college counselor, instructional math coach, Title VII/dual immersion specialist, literacy coach, educational therapist, after-school coordinator, and others. Educators working outside the K-12 system include museum educator, UCLA field supervisors, educational media consultant, doctoral students, education non-profit coordinator, college professors, and others. Interestingly, when we used the same categories to probe graduates future plans, none of the retained educators anticipated leaving education, but as Figure 3 demonstrates, it's clear that many see their role as extending beyond the classroom.

Figure 3: What will you be doing in 5 years?

Educator (Outside K-12) 7%
Leave Ed Temporarily 7%
Educator (Inside K-12) 7%
Administrator 5%
Substitute teacher 2%
Part time teacher 6%
Full time teacher 66%

Seeking professional communities: The multiple roles of urban educators

In 2002, we asked the incoming class of Center X students to look ahead to their own retention; 78% anticipated that they would be full time classroom teachers in five years—a figure that comes close to our cohort-based 24% five-year attrition rate. Interestingly, however, when asked, "Do you envision your career as primarily rooted in the classroom or in multiple roles extending beyond the classroom?" about seven out of ten (68%) chose "multiple roles." Moreover, those students who see themselves engaged in multiple roles beyond the classroom describe the reasons they entered teaching in different terms. Compared to their classroom-rooted peers, these students attach a higher level of importance to changing the world, furthering social justice, and working in a low-income community as reasons to become a teacher. Not surprisingly, envisioning yourself engaged in multiple roles is also related to viewing teaching as a stepping stone to leadership positions in public service. These intake data make clear a pattern we also see in our graduate data—most highly-qualified urban educators define their professional identity in multiple ways that extend beyond the classroom.

We asked graduates not just to identify their primary roles in education, but also the roles that they took on in addition to these primary roles. What emerges is a portrait of active, professionally engaged urban educators. Across the board, Center X graduates report that they take on a staggering array of commitments beyond their classrooms. More than half of educators take university courses and participate in observational visits to other schools. Eighty percent are involved in regularly scheduled collaboration with other teachers on issues of instruction, and 95% attend workshops, conferences or trainings. Additionally, 44% of the educators report involvement with individual or

collaborative research, 25% are part of a mentoring program, 20% participate in activist

organizations, and 17% participate in a network of teachers outside of their schools. In

addition to these professional development roles, a smaller percentage of graduates also

take on leadership roles. These include department/grade-level chair (8%), mentoring

other teachers (11%), administrators (2%), staff developers (13%), coaches (7%),

activists (7%), coordinators (13%) or some other leadership role (22%). Overall,

graduates report an average of five professional development and leadership roles in

addition to their primary job responsibilities.

Are these roles enabling educators to develop strong learning communities that

will sustain them as they become more accomplished professionals and enable their

schools to improve over time? Perhaps. Educators with more roles report that they stay

in education because they find teaching to be a fulfilling and challenging career and they

have good relationships with colleagues. They are also more satisfied with their

opportunities for professional advancement and report a higher degree of perceived

respect from society. But embedded in this issue is the very definition of an education

professional. Is the push to take on more and more professional roles and responsibilities

outside the classroom a positive one—one that will ultimately benefit students and

improve schools? The repercussions of framing classroom teaching as a stepping stone

to something larger, more important, and more respected are clearly problematic and

significant efforts are underway to frame teaching as a profession rooted in the

classroom.

As Johnson (2001) suggests, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) could lead to teaching as a staged career with multiple levels of accomplishment depending upon individual interest, energy, and ambition, all while retaining the teachers within the classroom. Harman (2001), NBPTS's Director of Research, envisions creating new leadership roles such as teaching university classes and mentoring preservice teachers, designing and presenting professional development programs, and creating flexible administrative structures that allow teachers to take on new roles without leaving the classroom such as pairing two teachers to teach a single class, thereby providing time for each to pursue professional activities. Efforts to professionalize teaching, such as NBPTS, will however have to address the unique conditions of urban schools where the creation of professional learning communities is exacerbated by higher rates of teacher turnover, greater percentages of new teachers as well as under-qualified teachers. Finding a professional foothold—a mentor teacher, a teaching team, space for reflection—is especially challenging in these settings. Add to these challenges the typically poor working conditions and lack of resources in urban schools and much of the retention crisis is explained. To escape this vicious cycle, we must understand the conditions under which urban teachers—like the faculty at Power Elementary—manage to stay connected to their profession and the students they care about.

The fragility of urban teaching: How hopefulness is dampened over time

Ms. Grant closed her e-mail with "feeling a bit weary today." Another pattern

emerging from our retention data is a gradual dampening of idealism, of hopefulness, of

commitment to changing the world through teaching. When we asked about their reasons

for teaching, 71% of those entering Center X said it was extremely important to them to

change the world and further social justice as a teacher. And for 64%, it was extremely

important to help kids in low-income communities. As Table 2 summarizes, over time

these commitments wane.

Table 2: Why do you stay in education?

Years in Education	I stay in education because I feel my work helps change the world and further social justice (rating=extremely important)	I stay in education because I'm committed to working in a low-income community (rating=extremely important)
2	57%	50%
3	47%	30%
4	41%	30%
5	49%	31%
6	39%	23%

We also asked respondents to indicate how strongly they agreed with the following

statement: "I am hopeful that my school/workplace will improve over time." Perhaps

predictably, responses are related to years in education and plans to stay or leave the

profession. The educators who express the least hope for school improvement are those who have been working the longest and those who plan to leave the profession.

This disheartening trend illustrates the fragility of teaching in urban, high-poverty schools. Despite their stellar and specialized urban teacher preparation and the fact that they all started with a strong commitment to teaching in urban high-poverty schools, approximately a third of each graduating cohort remains undecided–on the fence about whether to stick with teaching as a career. Despite the fact that every Center X graduate taught in an urban, high-poverty school their first year, they are steadily moving to less challenging contexts. Within Center X's first cohort, only 69% of those who have stayed in education, now in their 6th year, remain in high-poverty schools. Others have left the profession altogether. When asked why, the most important reasons that surface are dissatisfaction with working conditions and "I felt overwhelmed and emotionally drained." If we expect teachers to work with students who are regularly traumatized by poverty and violence, we have to support them in meaningful and powerful ways. We must help schools answer Ms. Grant's question, "How would you handle this?"   And we must learn from teachers like the ones at Power Elementary. As Nieto frames the enterprise: "what should we know about effective, caring, committed, persevering teachers, and how can we use this knowledge to support all teachers and in the process support the students who most need them?" (Nieto, 2003, p. 2). We continue our research on Center X graduates to answer just these questions.

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