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**Motives to Exit:
Career Choice or Disillusionment Among Young Charter School Teachers**

by
Catherine Alice Arenson

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education
in the
Graduate Division
of the
University of California, Berkeley

Committee in Charge:

Professor Heinrich Mintrop
Professor Judith W. Little
Professor Julian Chow

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Abstract
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Professor Heinrich Mintrop, Chair

Teacher turnover is an urgent problem in many schools serving disadvantaged populations. Reform efforts strive to provide a consistently rigorous and stable academic environment for students, but constant teacher turnover impedes the development of a stable learning community, making it difficult to improve and successfully implement reform efforts. Teacher turnover can occur for a variety of reasons, and understanding these reasons was the purpose of this research study. The aim was to better understand teacher turnover among a particular group of young, idealistic, social justice–oriented teachers that staff many of the most challenging urban charter schools. These teachers enter the field with excitement and appear passionately dedicated to making a difference, but then leave the profession after only a few years.

My research explored the motives of thirty teachers for entering and exiting the teaching profession. My initial hypothesis was that teachers possibly leave owing to career flexibility, reality shock, disillusionment, or burnout. I found the exit motives were most closely aligned with career flexibility and reality shock. The exit motives fell into three categories that were connected to the entrance motives: loss of passion or energy, shift in self-concept or self-identity, and loss of social connections. These motives blend and build on one another in the decision to leave the classroom.

A prosocial mindset and career uncertainty guided these young teachers to a temporary commitment to teaching. By choosing difficult school contexts they learned they could not make a positive impact. They left exhausted, though not to the degree of burnout, for work that better suited them.

Teaching is a profession that deserves the best of the best for our nation’s children. Pro-socially minded, ambitious, and hard-working people are a strong asset to our nation’s schools; however, commitment to the profession of teaching is essential. This study highlights the need for greater attention to recruiting, preparation, and structure of the work of teaching in order to secure teachers’ ongoing commitment to the profession.

Dedication

To my parents, Dr. Ron and Ellen Arenson, who have provided constant support, guidance, and inspiration as I ventured on this journey. I cherish them and only hope to emulate their strength, wisdom, and compassion. There is no greater feeling than their pride in me and I hope with this dissertation I have made them proud.

Table of Contents

Abstract	1
Dedication	i
Acknowledgements	iii
Introduction	1
Research Aim	2
Chapter 1: Consulting the Knowledge Base	2
Flexible Career Paths	2
Reality Shock	5
Movement Disillusionment	6
Teacher Burnout	8
Summary and Synthesis	10
Conceptual Framework	11
Chapter 2: Research Design and Methods	12
Case Selection	12
Data Collection	13
Data Analysis	14
Validity and Reliability	15
Conclusion	16
Chapter 3: Findings Across Cases	17
Broad Analysis	17
Entrance Motives	18
Entrance Motive: Pro-social Mindset	19
Entrance Motive: Career Uncertainty	21
Exit Motives	23
Exit Motive: Loss of Energy and Passion	24
Chapter 4: Individual Cases	32
Elizabeth Jones: Model Pattern	32
Sara Boyarin: Burnout Case	35
Trent Sorenson: Collective Mindset Case	39
Conclusion	40
Chapter 5: Analysis of Findings and Conclusion	41
Introduction	41
Entry Motives	41
Exit Motives	42
Implications for Practice	43
References	45
Appendices	50

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Finally, to the teachers and leaders of our society who may never know how deeply impactful their work is and how many people appreciate all that they do. Thank you.

Motives to Exit: Career Choice or Disillusionment Among Young Charter School Teachers

Introduction

Teacher turnover has gained increasing attention in educational research and among educational practitioners. High turnover, a common occurrence particularly in urban schools, makes implementing school improvement strategies and establishing school continuity difficult to achieve. Teacher turnover can occur for a variety of reasons, and understanding these reasons is the purpose of this research study. My study is designed to explore why teachers leave the classroom. If turnover is the result of individuals choosing to leave to pursue other opportunities, it is not as harmful to the individual but burdens the organization that needs to retrain continuously. However, if individuals are leaving education because of disillusionment or as a result of burnout, turnover is a problem with detrimental effects to both the individual and the profession.

There is a new wave of school reform designed around the expectation that teachers will leave after only a few years. These reform-modeled schools appear to seek and attract young, highly educated individuals who will ignite achievement and motivation even during their short stay (Little & Bartlett, 2010). These teachers dedicate all their time and energy to the work, sometimes to the point of exhaustion. Consequently, after a short time they leave and then are replaced by the next group of recruited teachers. These schools are usually charter schools that gear themselves toward social justice inequities such as closing the achievement gap, and couple this orientation with intense, deregulated, de-unionized work environments. I call these schools “movement” schools.

The movement schools are highly committed to moving students to something better, whether socially, financially, or emotionally. Among them, some target low-income students of color with a college track orientation. Students’ skills and aspirations are supposedly raised by extending the school day and increasing the learning time, thereby creating a culture of academic intensity. These schools have a strong orientation toward standardized tests, which gauge students’ proficiency in grade-specific subjects. High scores on test results are pursued with urgency and are essential for many schools to avoid probation status and loss of funding from the state. These test scores are treated by state and federal law as proof of work quality and as a demonstration that schools are competitive with their neighboring schools.

Schools with this new reform approach appear to expect and possibly encourage teacher turnover because entry is easy, investment in specific job skills is low, job security or any employment protection is weak, salaries are often low, and work conditions are stressful. Recruited teachers tend to be just entering the workforce.

The highly idealistic social justice mission of particular charter and public schools often creates an atmosphere of high commitment and high expectations for student achievement. The schools’ culture, structure, and practice are built with a mission of closing the achievement gap and striving for more equitable opportunities in college and beyond. Teachers often teach multiple classes with longer teaching periods and are expected to go above and beyond a typical teacher’s workload. The schools’ ethos seems to center on the assumption that students can catch up and be brought up to grade level based on the amount of work the teacher is willing to do. This is a work environment that might foster turnover unless teachers are highly committed.

Research Aim

The purpose of my research is to better understand teacher turnover among the particular group of young, idealistic, social justice-oriented teachers that staff many of the most challenging urban schools, both charter and public. These teachers often enter the field with enthusiasm and appear committed to a cause (Foote, 2008; Quartz & Teacher Education Program Research Group, 2003), but then leave the profession after only a few years. A review of current research sheds light on a number of motives for why teachers leave the profession so prematurely. One stems from the sociological fact that today's career paths tend to be flexible, and changing professions may be a "normal" occurrence for today's generation: career flexibility. A second motive, pervasive for generations of new teachers, is shock when confronted with the realities of teaching: reality shock. But for movement teachers, there may be a third motive, a different kind of disillusionment. They may experience a rapid shift from high-pitch idealism to rude awakenings and rapid disappointments once confronted with the reality of their work experience: movement disillusionment. And fourth, it is conceivable that teachers may leave not simply because of disillusionment, but because they experience burnout due to the relentless pace and intensity of an unregulated and high-performance-oriented workplace set in exceptionally difficult social contexts: burnout. Teacher burnout appears the most severe of all exit motives and is most devastating to the individuals and presumably the schools at large.

My review of the literature follows these four main exit motives. I begin by discussing the flexible and short-term career path of our current teaching force. I then review the novice teacher literature to illustrate the typical novice's experience with reality shock. I then examine the literature on social movement dynamics for patterns of disillusionment. I close with the literature on teacher burnout.

Chapter 1: Consulting the Knowledge Base

Flexible Career Paths

Current workforce. Career paths are now multiple, flexible, and short-term. The baby boomer generation prepared for a career for its life's work. Today, their children, younger Generation Xers (born 1965–1980) and the Millennials (1981–1999), have more career opportunities as members of a global economy and have grown up in an economic labor market that is far less stable than that of the earlier generations (Goldseker, 2006; Moen, 2005; Ng & Sears, 2010). Normal career path trajectories, even in professional fields, have shifted (Gray & Whitty, 2010), from the perspective both of employees and of employers. The new workforce has career expectations that differ from those of the previous generations (Johnson & Project on Next Generation of Teachers, 2004; Ng & Sears, 2010; Moen, 2005). Moen (2005) describes today's employees as "vulnerable to layoffs, downsizing, and forced early retirements." Jobs are structured by an increasing number of "risks and uncertainties associated with a competitive, global, and information-based economy" (p. 193). Jumping from one job to another and keeping an eye out for new opportunities are strategies employees use to exert control over their employment rather than being controlled by their employers. Goldseker (2006) explains that Xers:

appear frenetic as they jump from one opportunity to the next rather than remaining with one job for decades. . . . In their minds, moving from one opportunity reflects independence and adaptability. . . . Gen Xers are more often

motivated by values of opportunity, freedom and compassion as opposed to duty, patriotism and obligation (p. 6).

She further explains that Xers and Yers have the ability to navigate and learn from information technology, which allows these generational cohorts to advance far more rapidly than earlier generations. Though jumping from career to career or from position to position, young workers also have an intensive desire to find meaningful and satisfying work. The new generations value a balance between work and life while seeking rapid advancement, and they are willing to work hard to develop skills (Goldseker, 2006; Ng & Sears, 2010; Twenge, 2008).

The changes in career expectations of the new generations have created a large, competitive, and diversely talented pool of fast-moving, short-term, less career- and employer-committed employees. Thus it is quite conceivable that for young professionals, such as the movement teachers, leaving behind momentarily espoused commitments is a “normal” thing to do, nothing that would cause concern, anguish, emotional turmoil, or further self-reflection.

New generation of teachers. The multi-job career trajectory is as relevant to the new teaching force as it is to law, medicine, and business industries (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Peske et al., 2001). Susan Moore Johnson and researchers at the Next Generation of Teachers Project at Harvard discussed this new generation of teachers in the book *Finders and Keepers: Helping New Teachers Survive and Thrive in Our Schools* (2004). The book characterizes the changing societal context of teaching over the last half of the 20th century and describes how teachers today differ from their predecessors in their motivations to teach, their preparation for the job, the context of their work, and their brief teaching careers.

Although a short-term career in teaching is not a historically new phenomenon, it has surfaced with strong force in recent years. In her book Johnson drew from her earlier 2003 study with colleague Sarah E. Birkeland, finding that the number of teachers who planned to stay in teaching until retirement was negligible, and she argued that therefore “teaching as a career may revert to being short-term, itinerant work once again” (2004, p. 28).

Johnson highlighted three key aspects of the new generation that sets it apart from the earlier generations of teachers. First, they enter teaching at a variety of life and career stages. Second, they have varying routes to the classroom in terms of preparation and licensing. Third, they have different career expectations from their predecessors’.

First-career vs. midcareer entrants. In the NGT study, half of the teachers are first-career entrants and the other half are second- and third-career entrants. The first-career entrants are the most similar to the veteran teachers. This older generation often knew years in advance that they wanted to teach, and they took a longer path in preparation for teaching. Many of these teachers believe that teaching is meaningful work and that they are well matched for the profession.

The midcareer entrants are a new and diverse group contributing to the changing teacher workforce. Johnson said this group viewed teaching as an opportunity to do more meaningful work than they had in their previous job. They might have left their job because they were unsatisfied or unfulfilled and believed teaching to be more meaningful.

Preparation and licensing. Today, many individuals are coming to teaching from alternative routes. Johnson described the alternatively prepared teachers experiencing an abbreviated form of pre-service preparation before jumping into the classroom. This group of teachers places a high value on their innate teaching ability and professional experience, believing they already have skills that will transfer to teaching. They do not see the value in education preparation programs. Many of the alternatively certified teachers are the midcareer

entrants who want to enter the profession quickly to avoid the time and cost of coursework and student teaching.

Career expectations. Although it is reasonable to assume that the traditionally certified, first-career teachers who are most similar to the veteran teachers have long-term expectations for their teaching profession, Johnson & Birkeland (2003) found even these teachers are tentative about a lifelong career. Only four out of the fifty teachers that Johnson studied stated that they plan to stay in teaching until they retire.

The researchers divide the teachers with a short-term expectation for their teaching careers into two groups: those that entered teaching with an *exploration* orientation and those with a *contributing* orientation. The explorers want to see if teaching is a good fit. If they feel they are well suited they may consider staying with it. If not, they will move on. The teachers with a contributing orientation view teaching as a short-term opportunity to contribute to society. Unlike the explorers, the teachers who want to make a contribution to society are not open to the possibility of staying in teaching for long (Johnson, 2004).

Johnson stated,

Though these explorers and contributors made only a short-term commitment to teaching, they were not at all casual about what they hoped to achieve in the classroom during that time. Rather, they intended to pour themselves into the job, giving it all they had, but only for a few years (p. 30).

A more recent publication brings to light seven trends of the new teaching force. Ingersoll and colleagues (2014) used the most comprehensive source of data on teachers from the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) to explore and suggest these trends. They discovered that the new generation of teachers have changed greatly and even though these trends are dramatic, little has been noticed by researchers, policymakers, and the public. The seven trends are (a) Larger, (b) Grayer, (c) Greener, (d) More Female, (e) More Diverse, by Race-ethnicity, (f) Consistent in Academic Ability, and (g) Less Stable.

The seven trends. First, the teaching force is *larger*. “The rate of these increases has not matched those of the baby boom years—with one large difference . . . the rate of increase for teachers has far outpaced the rate of increase for students” (p. 2).

Second, the teaching force is getting *older*. This trend was originally linked to teacher shortage as predicted by the increasing number of students and the number of teachers retiring. “Shortfalls of teachers, the argument surmised, would force many school systems to resort to lowering standards to fill teaching openings, inevitably resulting in high numbers of under-qualified teachers and low school performance” (p. 8).

Third, the teaching force has a large number of *beginning* teachers. This increase in beginning teachers matches the increase in new hires. These beginning teachers are both young, recent college graduates as well as middle-aged career changers. “New teachers can be a source of fresh ideas and energy . . . on the other hand, having an increasingly larger number of beginners, along with an increasingly smaller number of veterans in a school, could also have a negative impact” (p. 12).

Fourth, the teaching force is more heavily *female*. Although historically teaching was a predominantly female occupation, it has gotten even more disproportionately female. Even as increasing numbers of females enter traditionally male occupations such as physician, lawyer, and architect, still more are entering teaching. “Since the early 1980s there has been a steady increase in the proportion of teachers who are female, from 67 percent in 1980–81 to over 576 percent in 2011–12” (p. 14). This increase is not due to a decrease in males entering the

profession, either. Ingersoll and colleagues (2014) suggest a few possible reasons for this increase in females, including (a) females have more job opportunities in general including those in the education sector, particularly in the secondary level and leadership positions; and (b) the proportion of women entering the paid workforce has increased greatly on the whole. There are more job opportunities for females and more females are filling these positions.

Fifth, the teaching force is more *racially diverse*. For decades there has been a lack of teachers of color in schools that serve mostly students of color. This deficit gathered increasing attention and is thought to have contributed to the achievement gap (Torres, Santos, Peck, & Cortes, 2004). In response, efforts to recruit more teachers of color have helped to increase the diversity of the teaching force.

Sixth, members of the teaching force are more *consistent in their academic ability*. Teaching has been and still is often viewed as a less attractive profession for top college graduates. Teachers tended to have below-average academic test scores. However, in recent decades there seems to be an increase in males and females from top academic institutions.

Seventh, the teaching force is *less stable*. Teacher attrition is similar to that of police officers and far higher than in other respected professions such as nursing, law, and engineering. “From 1988-89 to 2008-09, annual attrition from the teaching force as a whole rose by 41 percent, from 6.4 percent to 9 percent” (Ingersoll et al., 2014, p. 23).

To summarize: The context of our public schools has changed and the teaching force has changed in a number of ways. The teaching force is larger, older, and more inexperienced. Teachers have become more homogeneously female and yet more heterogeneous by race-ethnicity. More teachers are coming from top-ranked colleges and universities. The teaching force is also far less stable.

Reality Shock

It is well documented (Day, 1959; Griffith & Wilson, 2001, 2003; Hoy & Woolfolk, 1990; McArthur, 1978; Serow, Eaker, & Forrest, 1994; Shkedi & Laron, 2004; Smagorinsky, Gibson, Bickmore, Moore, & Cook, 2004) that in the first few years of teaching the majority of teachers lose their initial idealism and projected efficacy. Huberman (1989) describes the early sequences of career development. At first there is an exploration stage, followed by a stabilization stage. “In the exploration stage, an individual makes a preliminary choice, investigates its parameters. . . . if this phase is positive, we move on to the stage of stabilization or commitment” (p.32). Presumably if the experience is negative, the individual does not reach the stabilization stage. Veenman (1984) defined this transition as possibly dramatic and traumatic. He summarizes, “this concept is used to indicate the collapse of the missionary ideals formed during teacher training by the harsh and rude reality of everyday classroom life” (p. 143). This reality shock and loss of idealism is one explanation for why some might leave their jobs within the first few years.

Reality shock is often associated with an increasing need to focus on controlling the students in order to manage the classroom (McArthur, 1978) rather than focusing on engaging learning activities they might have learned in teacher training. Hoy and Woolfolk (1990) found the same phenomenon in their study. They studied three groups of college educated students who became more focused on controlling the students as they completed their practice teaching. Smagorinsky et al. (2004) described this “need to control” phenomenon as a mismatch between the progressive pedagogy taught in teacher education programs and the reality in the field. This

mismatch leads ultimately to the praxis shock the new teachers feel when they transition from their training to their first year teaching.

This shock is also a common phenomenon in other service professions, such as medicine. Griffith and Wilson (2003) studied medical students in 2001 and 2003 and found a loss of idealism in the students' perspectives in their third year. They also were less optimistic about their professional happiness.

Serow, Eaker, and Forrest (1994) further this notion of waning idealism. They constructed a multi-method study of 400 candidates for secondary teaching certification. They state, "(the) best known interpretation is that attitudes towards teaching take on an increasingly idealistic tenor during the undergraduate years but seldom stand up to the realities of the public school classroom" (p. 35).

Reality shock might be more common or more noticeable in today's most challenging schools because of the poor working conditions, challenging social conditions, and pressures teachers face to meet student achievement expectations. Typically the schools serving students with the most needs are the schools that are under-resourced, under-staffed, and under-performing.

Movement Disillusionment

I provisionally classified as movement teachers those who teach in the social justice-minded schools; they are part of a new movement within education whose mission it is to fight the achievement gap between students of color and white students. If recruitment into teaching follows a specific social movement dynamic, then these teachers' motivation may develop similarly to motivational patterns of social movements: high initial enthusiasm, energy, and commitment and then rapid loss of this initial enthusiasm when the "romancing" of the work meets realities. The loss of high energy and commitment for teaching appears similar to the fallout or disbandment of social movements.

A social movement is a group of people who share a common ideology joining together to achieve a certain goal. Social movements employ informal, emotionally charged, and symbolic collective action to achieve the chosen goal. They have included the American Civil Rights movement of the 1960s and the five-year boycott led by Cesar Chavez that spurred millions of supporters, forging a national support coalition of farm workers. Notable movements are usually large and endure over years; however, Jasper (1998) described a social movement as "one corner in social life: the collective, concerted efforts to change some aspect of a society" (p. 399), implying that social movements can also occur on a smaller scale.

The literature on social movements is vast, but surprisingly little attention has been paid to the de-motivation of participants and the downswing of most movements over time (Jasper 1998; Klandermans, 1993; Taylor, 1989; Zald & McCarthy, 1979). However, the literature does explain motivation patterns unique to movements, the role of group dynamics, and the emotional shifts that typically occur over time, giving us an idea of movement-specific disillusionment.

Movements need a common concern, such as a perceived injustice or a belief that conflicts with an established norm, to unite participants and fuel their enthusiasm. Similar beliefs and values among the participants can solidify the movement's goals (Klandermans, 1993). The common belief is the core of the social network of the movement, which creates a feeling of connectedness and belonging. The meaningfulness of the cause, paired with connectedness and belonging, fuels movement participation. Individuals must also perceive their own personal usefulness and contribution to the movement (Passy & Giugni, 2001).

Emotions are a central element of every stage of social movements. They are the keystone of movements in that they attract people as well as drive them away. Jasper (1998) investigated the emotional patterns in the emergence, recruitment, longevity, and decline of social movements. He theorized five causal mechanisms that constitute the different stages in social movements. The first is a moral shock, elicited by an event or piece of information that raises anger or outrage in people and leads them to act. The second is the blame given to the entity that caused the problem. Third is frame alignment, which allows a group to unite and create a common definition, voice, and mission. One frame is the injustice frame, which captures the social movement involving teachers and their organizations. In this frame, blame is assigned to a human agency for a perceived injustice. The fourth causal mechanism is collective identity. Jasper stated, “collective identity is seen as the spur to action because one values the potential gain for the group, so that identity thereby helps to define one’s interests.” Finally, there is “cognitive liberation” which is the ability of the participants to recognize an opportunity for action. Action will take place only if the participants recognize the opportunities to act.

The loss of movement participants is a manifestation of the decline of a movement. The individual disillusionment that leads to the decision to leave is wrapped up in the intense emotions described by Jasper. Entrance into the movement is paired with heightened experiences such as being called to action, belonging to a group of similar beliefs, and pursuing a common, idealized goal to change a part of society. Movement participants ride a wave of emotions built up by unrealistic romancing of ideals and goals, as well as a heightened sense of both personal and collective efficacy. Yet these emotions inevitably lose strength with time and with all the changing perceptions and feelings of the other participants. The individuals’ initial enthusiasm and commitment weakens in disillusionment and the movement folds.

Teach For America: Social justice movement in education? Some have argued that organizations such as Teach For America or Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) employ movement-like dynamics to recruit novices into their fold and compel them to commit to very hard-to-staff workplaces without much preparation (Foote, 2008).

The college graduates who apply to Teach For America (TFA) do not necessarily believe they will individually change the entire system. However, upon meeting other corps members and bonding during an intensive six-week training housed in college dormitories, the corps members see the larger potential impact they could make. The program relies on this collective identity in order for corps members to see themselves as the vehicles through which the TFA mission is accomplished.

Donna Foote’s book *Relentless Pursuit: A year in the trenches with Teach For America* (2008) described the social movement in education today through the experience of four Teach For America corps members in Los Angeles. Foote captured the social movement characteristics of Teach For America. Wendy Kopp founded TFA with the intention that the organization “take on what she considered to be the number one civil rights issue of her generation: the educational achievement gap between the rich and the poor in America” (p. 28). Foote explained that TFA grew from a “small grassroots movement” toward one of the “most successful—and sophisticated—non-profits in the country.” The organization’s mission is to “build the movement to eliminate educational inequity by enlisting our nation’s most promising future leaders in the effort” (Teach For America, About Us section, para. 2). Foote described the strong culture that attracts hundreds of college graduates from the nation’s top colleges to teach for two years in the poorest communities across America. She captured their relentless pursuit to provide an excellent education to their students and have their students show significant gains even in their

first year of teaching. This effort resembles the lofty and ambitious goals of individuals in social movements in our nation.

Movement participants experience a wave-like emotional cycle when participating in the movement, and falling out of it. Maintaining the initial enthusiasm and identity is the key to the maintaining this initial commitment. A multitude of factors, from long hours to changing goals and lack of success, can lead members to decamp. Participants may experience disillusionment, and as more individuals stray from the collective identity and purpose of their fight, the entire movement loses strength. Disillusionment appears to develop as the unrealistic ideals and goals make participants confront the reality of the hard work, exploitative working conditions, lack of personal feelings of competency, and lack of capacity to change the injustice that is the impetus for the movement. The emotional wave might crest in the course of their first few years of teaching, when realizing the impossibility of their ideals and goals can cause a disillusionment so devastating that they leave the movement.

Teacher Burnout

Defining teacher burnout. While Reality Shock is something temporary that most novices undergo but survive with some adaptation, and while negative feelings associated with movement disillusionment may abate as soon as one has dissolved the connection with the movement and dissociated from the “unrealistic” dream, burnout may have more severe negative consequences for the individuals, which are more long-lasting, because burnout, as defined by the psychological literature, reaches into the deeply personal core of individual workers and causes sustained suffering.

Burnout has become a commonly understood term across human service professions. It has also become an everyday term used by many people, and its meaning has been stretched and distorted. Schwab (1983) states, “it has become faddish and indiscriminate, an item of psychobabble, the psychic equivalent, in its ubiquitousness, of jogging” (p. 21).

Freudenberger (1974) first defined burnout as the inability to function in one’s job because of long and intensive work-related stress. Maslach and Jackson (1981) constructed a definition of burnout through three interrelated yet independent dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and loss of personal accomplishment. *Emotional exhaustion* is feelings of depletion or fatigue and the feeling that one has nothing more to give to one’s job in terms of emotional or physical energy. *Depersonalization* is the development of negative feelings and anger toward others. *Loss of personal accomplishment* is described as the deterioration of one’s self-esteem and self-competence, and a growing dissatisfaction with one’s accomplishments. Maslach and Jackson (1981) developed the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) to measure the burnout phenomenon. Their work is well cited, and most research in the field of teacher burnout builds from their definition and assessment of burnout captured through these three dimensions. Studies from the past few decades have tried to further explore the three dimensions of burnout that Maslach and Jackson established.

Friedman (1993) studied how the three dimensions work together. He found that feelings of frustration and discouragement are at the core of burnout and can lead to a desire to quit. Depersonalization followed by emotional exhaustion was most closely correlated with burnout. He described the core as the “climax” and explained that the third dimension, loss of personal accomplishment, was the furthest away from this “climax” compared to the other two. This description gives the first two dimensions more weight than the third, whereas Maslach described the three dimensions as having equal weight. Another study added a dimension.

Salanova and colleagues (2005) studied 957 employees, of whom 49% were human service workers. Through a factor analysis of questionnaires, it was suggested that cynicism and depersonalization were two distinct variables and contribute to burnout differently. The authors recommended, based on these findings, that cynicism be added as a fourth dimension.

The Maslach and Jackson (1981) dimensions were deepened by the work of Densten (2001). He constructed a five-factor model that included psychological and somatic strain elements in the emotional exhaustion dimension and added two aspects under the lack of personal accomplishment: *self* and *others*.

It is probable that researchers will continue to explore and define teacher burnout. Investigating the minute differences of numerous studies extending and refining the definition of burnout is not the purpose of this paper. In this review of literature I will use the definition established by Maslach and Jackson (1981), include the work of Salanova, et al. (2005), and add Densten's (2001) expansions. I will review research on the sources of burnout. The next three bodies of research are divided into studies that explore both the personal characteristics and the environmental or situational factors that are sources of burnout.

Sources of burnout.

Studies of personal and environmental characteristics. Leiter and Maslach (1988) investigated the impact of the interpersonal environment on burnout and commitment. They found that emotional exhaustion was more prevalent in teachers with a negative interpersonal work environment, one in which there was more role conflict and unpleasant contact with supervisors. Pleasant interpersonal contact with coworkers was related to feelings of personal accomplishment and inversely related to depersonalization. Their study supports many of the findings of studies discussed earlier.

Mazur and Lynch (1989) further explored these individual and environmental interactions with the addition of observing the influence of the school leader. They studied the extent to which teacher personality characteristics, organizational structures, and the principals' leadership style determine teacher burnout. This study found that leadership style was not a significant predictor of burnout. The organizational stress factors; work overload, support, and isolation were significant factors of teacher burnout. Mazur and Lynch (1989) also found that personality characteristics such as anomie, personality type (A and B), and empathetic self-concept were significant predictors of teacher burnout. Their study combines the results of studies reviewed earlier and support many of their findings.

Farber (2000) describes how our changing culture has influenced the burnout phenomenon over the last 20–30 years. He defines burnout as “a perception on the part of human-service professionals that their efforts to help others have been ineffective, that the task is endless, and the personal payoffs for their work (in terms of accomplishment, recognition, advancement, or appreciation) have not been forthcoming” (p. 589). Our American culture now asks people to do more with less. Formerly, burnout resulted in a person working harder and harder until he became too emotionally exhausted to go on. Now, Farber argues, burnout is generated from a pressure to meet the demands of others, by competition between coworkers, by a drive for more money, or by the sense that one deserves more. This study sheds light on the influence of the greater society. It may be that both Farber's conceptions (traditional and current) are present.

Byrne (1994) administered inventories and questionnaires to nearly 1500 Canadian teachers to understand both the organizational factors (role ambiguity, role conflict, work overload, classroom climate, decision making, superior support, peer support) and personality

factors (self-esteem, presence of external locus of control) on the burnout identified by Maslach and Jackson (1981). Byrne (1994) revealed the importance of role conflict, work overload, classroom climate, decision making, and peer support as organizational determinants. She found that self-esteem and locus of control were as important in determining teacher burnout as the organizational factors. She concluded by stating that teacher burnout is not uni-dimensional.

Summary and Synthesis

Teacher turnover is a common occurrence in our school system today. Cycling through teachers can negatively impact schools because there is little continuity in teaching practice and school culture. The purpose of this study is to better understand the reasons teachers leave their schools and the teaching profession after serving only for a short time. I am studying a particular group of teachers that have formed a new wave in education reform: young, idealistic, and ambitious teachers who tend to teach for a short time in social justice-oriented schools.

This literature review has helped identify four distinct motivational patterns: Flexible Career Paths, Reality Shock, Movement Disillusionment, and Burnout.

Careers today are multiple, flexible, and short term. Today's workforce desires meaningful and satisfying work and will work hard to attain the job that is a perfect fit. A new generation of teachers has emerged that differs from its predecessors in its motivation to teach, and preparation within a work context that is also different. These teachers, like their generation at large, do not expect a long-term career. Instead they want to explore the field to see if it suits them or allows them to contribute to society in a meaningful way before moving on to another job. A career change is a self-motivated choice and appears less influenced by the job itself than by the individual's predilection. Contrastingly, the three other motives involve factors of the job itself that may cause or influence the individual to leave.

Teachers might experience reality shock upon entering the classroom. This shock is a reaction to the unanticipated harshness of the work environment. Reality shock is common among all service professions. Studies have shown that during training or preparation individuals have an idealism and projected efficacy that is lost once beginning their work. Transitioning from training to the actual job experience can be traumatic. An ideological and attitudinal shift has been documented among new teachers in reaction to the reality of the classroom experience. Presumably that reality shock may be even more extreme or develop more rapidly in many of the particularly challenging public school settings that teachers face today. Poor working conditions, student accountability pressures, limited resources, and low job stability can compound the shock for a new teacher. Although the teacher still ultimately chooses to leave, this decision is in part spurred by his or her reaction to the work environment. The group of professionals entering a service profession like teaching may be more prone to choosing a profession that involves people and relationships and that inevitably involves emotions, both positive and negative. Teachers experiencing praxis shock might come up against an environment in which the emotional strain caused by the workplace is too much. The teacher chooses to leave and find a job better suited for him or her.

Similar to reality shock, yet more specific to a smaller subset of new teachers is movement disillusionment. Part of the new wave in education in which a top priority is public school reform and a striving to make schools more educationally equitable, the new group of teachers in social justice-oriented schools are striving to close the achievement gap and ensure an equitable education. These movement teachers may match the Teach For America corps members in their personal characteristics as well as their ideology of teaching. This wave of

teachers acting on a common concern closely resembles members of other social movements. Similar to individuals who join social movements, these teachers share a collective mindset with a larger group of teachers who fight for the same cause. The teachers lose themselves in the group and feel a part of something bigger than themselves. In a social movement life cycle, typically there is a decline in enthusiasm and commitment, which ultimately leads to dropping out of the movement. Teachers might become disillusioned through feelings of disappointment, lack of success, and emotional and physical exhaustion. Teachers becoming disillusioned will disassociate from the movement and leave the profession. Movement disillusionment appears particularly detrimental because it involves the loss both of a passion-filled fight for a cause that one believed in deeply, and of a social network. The decision to leave is more provoked by the fall out of the movement than it is by the choice to find something better.

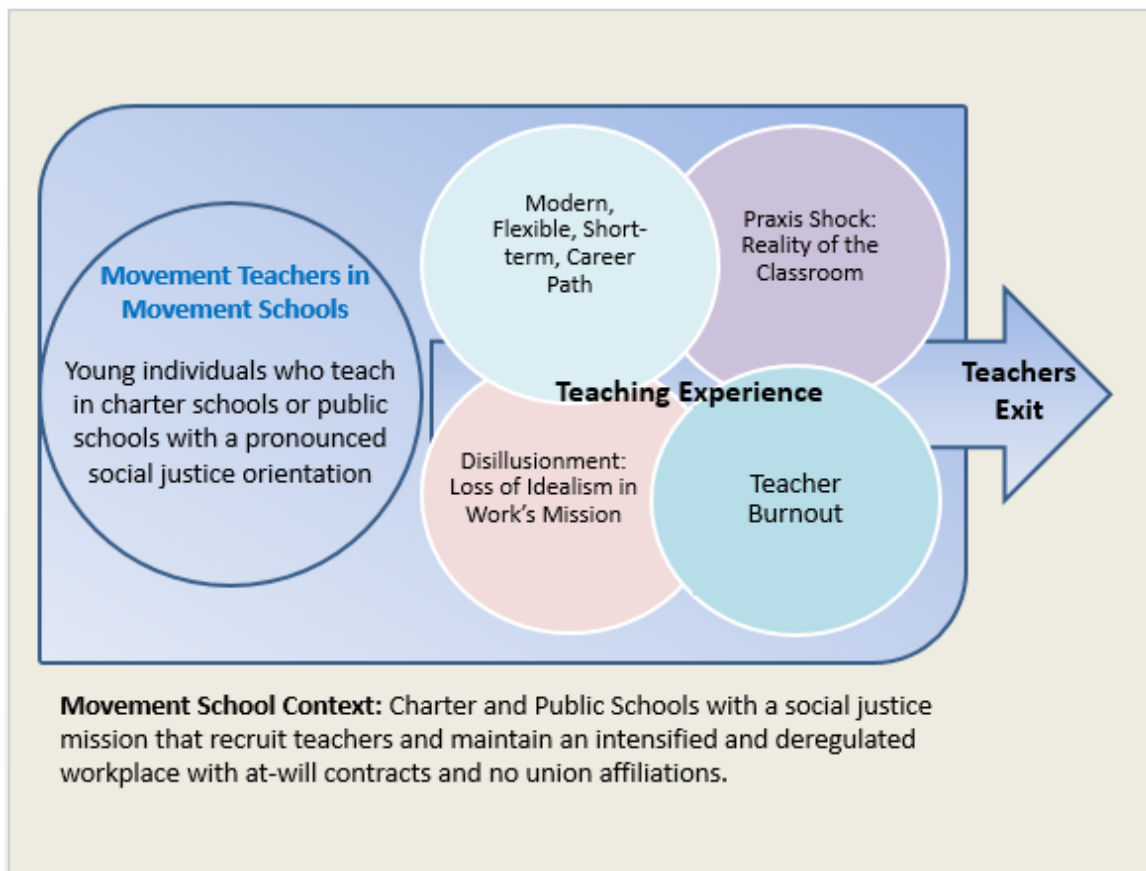
There are four possible exit motives teachers have for leaving the classroom and the education profession all together. In all likelihood the four patterns cannot be clearly distinguished in real life. They are meant to be ideal-types. The four motives articulate a gradual shift from an individual choosing to leave to an individual having to leave. This framework will allow me to discover finer nuances between the patterns that more accurately reflect the real-life experiences of a select group of movement teachers.

Conceptual Framework

Drawing from the literature, my study is guided by a conceptual framework consisting of three main contextual conditions: movement culture, recruitment of a specific type of idealistic teacher, and an intensification of work expectations within a deregulated workplace. Within this context and the teachers' experiences, the exit motives are formed. The literature sheds light on the complexity involved in teacher turnover.

As this is an exploratory study, I am open to the possibility of other categories having an influence or the possibility that some teachers have more than one category of motive.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model



Chapter 2: Research Design and Methods

Working from a social constructivist epistemology (Creswell, 2007), I constructed my study to gather a comprehensive body of information in order to arrive at a deep understanding of my participants' experiences and reasons for leaving teaching. In order to best capture, comprehend, and analyze the teachers' experiences, I formatted my research as a qualitative multiple-case narrative of thirty teachers. Yin (2009) described a multiple-case narrative as a study that can be drawn from a single set of cross-case conclusions. I employed a cross-case design because analytical conclusions arising across multiple cases are more powerful than those coming from an individual case (Yin, 2003). The narrative design allowed me to dive deeply into individuals' experiences, while the multiple-case analysis allowed for drawing broader conclusions about teachers and their school settings.

This study was exploratory because I wanted to discover and understand the experiences of the teachers. Creswell (2009) explained narrative research as a "strategy of inquiry in which the researcher studies the lives of individuals and asks individuals to provide stories about their lives" (p. 13). The teachers' stories of their teaching experience and reasons for leaving helped me explore teacher exiting. The narrative research approach aimed at an open and exploratory investigation in which my findings could not be fully predetermined. However, my investigation was bounded by theory and my analytical leads.

Case Selection

Cases were selected to allow for close examination. Selecting particular teachers who had taught for at least one year and then chose to leave the classroom created a common frame and helped me capture patterns in the teachers' experiences. Creswell (2009) stated that in

conducting narrative research “one needs to find individuals (who are) distinctive for their accomplishments and ordinariness or who shed light on a specific phenomenon or issue being explored” (p. 119).

There are many charter and traditional public schools that I could classify as social justice, reform-modeled schools. As a former charter school management organization (CMO) teacher and an instructional coach currently working for a similar CMO, I have learned that there are many similarities between these social justice-oriented charter and traditional public school organizations. Since I was interested in social justice-minded schools, the majority of my participants came from charter school contexts. I drew from a variety of charter and traditional public schools.

As an instructional coach for new teachers (new to the profession as well as new to the organization) over the past six years I have worked with several teachers who taught for one to four years and then left teaching. Working with teachers in this capacity allowed me to draw upon this relationship when reaching out to ask them to participate. I asked previous and current co-workers if they knew other teachers who worked in their Aspire schools for more than one year and then left teaching.

I studied teachers who lived in the Bay Area in order to meet them face to face. Living close-by allowed me to meet with a few teachers multiple times to clarify my interpretation of their experiences or beliefs and make sure my portrayal was accurate.

Participants. The participants of this study shared many qualities of first-year teachers of the current generation; however, my study focused primarily on teachers who chose social justice-oriented charter schools or were members of social justice-oriented organizations, such as Teach for America, that placed them in traditional public schools to work. Almost all of these participants left their movement-school classrooms after one to three years.

Twenty-five of the thirty participants took a survey to illuminate the demographic characteristics of the group. Over half the participants are between twenty-five and thirty. Only two of all the participants are over forty. Predictably, given the demographics of the teaching profession, there are far more women interviewed than men. Two-thirds are women. Two-thirds identify as Non-Hispanic, White or Euro-American. Three participants identified as Latino, two as Asian, one as African American, and two as other. Nearly half had a master’s degree. Two-thirds of the participants’ parents had a college or master’s degree as well. Half of the participants were born and raised on the West Coast: ten from California, two from Washington, one from Arizona, and one from Colorado. Three participants are originally from Minnesota. The others are from the East Coast and South: two from New Jersey, one from Pennsylvania, and two from Virginia. Only one person majored in education as an undergraduate. The majority studied a discipline within the social sciences. Six were science majors.

Eighty percent left their last school after one or three years of working there. Over half taught for two to three years. One-third, however, taught for more than six years. Almost two-thirds are still in the field of education. Six people are teaching: four in public school, two in independent schools. Nearly half of the participants (thirteen) are working in public or charter sectors of education, but not as classroom teachers. Every participant was either affiliated with a charter school organization with a pronounced social justice orientation or was a Teach For America corps member. For this sample, therefore, exit does not mean exit from education, but exit from the tough and low-income classroom teaching assignments.

Data Collection

Interviews were the source of my data. Interviews are an important source to gather life stories (Yin, 2009; Gudmundsdottir, 1996; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Mishler, 1986). I used an in-depth interview (Yin, 2009) that was loosely structured in the beginning and semi-structured toward the end. The majority of the questions were open-ended (Patton, 1990; Creswell, 2007). Interview protocols were structured to ask questions in a fluid rather than rigid manner, while taking care to ensure that questions were unbiased (Yin, 2003).

The narrative interview structure and process began with building trust and rapport with each participant (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Hogan, 1988; Noddings, 1986). Hogan (1988) argued that the relationship between the researcher and participant develops over time. Strong relationships involve feelings of connectedness through a sense of equality, caring, and mutual purpose and intention. The relationship between the researcher and the participant is a collaborative one in which the participant's story is retold and understood. Noddings (1986) and Hogan (1990) highlighted the importance of listening to the participant and establishing trust by giving value to "their voice." Listening to the participant's story first is key in the beginning of the relationship or interview. Hence the interview questions were not only delivered in a trustworthy way, sincerely inquiring and valuing the respondent's experience, but also crafted to support the participant in retelling his or her story authentically. My questions were open and exploratory in the beginning as I developed my relationship and trust with each teacher. As the relationship grew I used prompts that helped them dive further into their experiences and their retelling. I also shared my own experience to build rapport and trust. Toward the end of my contact with participants I used more pointed prompts that probed the usefulness of the concepts that made up my initial theoretical framework.

My interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the participants and transcribed for analysis. During each interview I took field notes for the purpose of formulating new questions as the interviews progressed. This approach allowed me to capture the participants' stories and ask clarifying questions to check my interpretations.

I gathered information about teachers' preparation or prior work experience, their entry stories, their work experiences, and their exit stories. I transcribed completed interviews as soon as possible. Learning from the completed interviews helped me make changes or pose new questions in the following interviews. I was also able to reflect on the information collected and develop questions to probe for deeper meaning and clarification.

Data Analysis

I used the literature and my conceptual framework to develop an initial coding system for data analysis, but also relied on an inductive coding strategy so that unexpected issues that arose in the data could be captured. I used this approach to generate rich descriptions of the teachers' experiences.

The data collected for this research study was analyzed through multiple stages of coding to allow themes and patterns to surface. Creswell (2007) explained that coding begins by "reducing the data into meaningful segments and assigning names for the segments," then "combining the codes into broader categories or themes," and finally, "displaying and making comparisons in data graphs, tables, and charts" (p. 148).

My initial analysis consisted of extensively reviewing the transcribed interviews and field notes to gain a broad sense of the data. Next, I conducted an initial analysis using inductive coding by allowing the themes and patterns to emerge from the data (Creswell, 2009). I then used a systematic approach to analyze the transcribed interviews. My initial coding used low

inference descriptive codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994) that captured the data and related to my conceptual framework. The descriptive codes were initially framed by the four theorized motives and helped me identify larger patterns and themes. Following the inductive reasoning process I analyzed both the transcriptions and the descriptive codes multiple times until I had compiled the most representative and comprehensive set of codes for the data. Once my codes were set, I sorted elements of my transcription text into these categories for further scrutiny and for the purpose of refining the codes if appropriate. This sorting allowed me to analyze the data within the separate themes across participant responses more clearly. Some codes were modified, and new themes emerged that needed additional codes.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure qualitative validity, the study incorporated strategies that helped me detect validity threats. In order for my findings to be trustworthy, authentic, and credible, I employed the validity strategy Creswell (2009) suggested: having my participants confirm my translation of their explanations, ideas, and thoughts. I orally shared with them my interpretations from the transcriptions. As themes emerged from the data, I intentionally sought, reported, and discussed evidence that contradicted the general perspective and emerging themes of the study. By perusing this contradictory evidence, readers were able to weigh for themselves the merits of the claims, increasing the credibility of the study (Creswell, 2009).

I made sure that my findings were reliable by documenting all my procedures, codes, reflections, and notes. As Yin (2003) suggested, it is important that the researcher documents as many steps of the procedures as possible. Gibbs (2007) recommended specific reliability procedures such as checking transcripts for errors made during the transcription process, as well as checking for a change in the definitions and meanings of the codes during the process of coding the documents.

Bias and trustworthiness. As a Teach For America corps member, former KIPP founding teacher and administrator, and currently an Aspire Public Schools instructional coach, I was strongly involved with the teachers and organizations that I was interested in studying.

During my second semester senior year at Duke University, I had no idea what I wanted to do. I had majored in psychology and did not have a specific career track. My parents both had successful professional careers and my sister at the time was in law school. The expectations in my family were implicit. I was to follow in their footsteps and become a successful contributor to society through hard work, education, and ambition. Other than those expectations, I had the freedom to choose my career path, and my parents encouraged me to explore rather than rush into a track that did not fit me.

The Teach For America program embodied all that I was looking for in a next step after college. The organization's program and mission not only intrigued me, but also tapped into the "wanting to give back to society" feeling I had. TFA would allow me to do something important, impactful, difficult, and personally life-changing. Through its highly selective process and growing prestige, it would be a great resume builder for whatever my following endeavor should be.

I spent six years with the KIPP and although I remain an idealist and will continue to strive for educational equity, I cannot imagine working as hard as I did in my years of teaching. Programs such as TFA and KIPP are sprouting up everywhere, and the movement has expanded in new directions. Yet the focus remains that of providing an excellent education for low-income

students of color. Looking back on these programs I am grateful for the experience and all that I learned.

However, in reflection, I felt fatigued. Something happened in the last three years at my charter school. I had moved into an administrative position and thought that the stress and the lack of self-accomplishment I felt in the classroom would dissipate. It did not. As well, I began to feel that the organization had turned against me by not honoring my six-year commitment. I ended up leaving. It was an unsustainable situation. I felt burned-out and used.

It is this burnout experience in this new reform model of the public education system that has driven me to my present study. I studied a group of teachers that shared my ideals, values, beliefs, and drive to combat society's inequity in education.

The basis of the study was to explore the phenomenon of teacher attrition that I have observed countless times in those around me and that I have been a part of myself. At this point I have gained some distance from these occurrences and entered a phase of reflection and meaning making.

However, I am still emotionally engaged with my topic. In order to avoid bias associated with this engagement I reflected on and assessed my own thinking throughout the study as well as discussing how my background might influence my findings (Creswell, 2009). My goal was always to better understand the teachers' perspectives on their experiences and their reasons for leaving this social movement.

There was certainly the potential for an advocacy bias in this research. An advocacy bias occurs when the values of the researcher affect the conduct of the study or the findings (Stake, 2006). Among the factors that can contribute to an advocacy bias are the researcher's hope of finding a confirmation to predetermined findings or assumptions, the desire to reach conclusions that are useful to others, and the desire to generate findings that will stimulate action (Stake, 2006). In order to avoid this advocacy bias, throughout the research process I reflectively examined and discussed how my background and work as a practitioner might have shaped my findings (Creswell, 2009).

To this end, I sought out discrepant information (Creswell, 2009) that diverged from the themes I constructed. Throughout coding modification and refinement I actively sought contrary perspectives to the themes and patterns I saw emerging. By presenting the different perspectives "the account becomes more realistic and hence valid" (p.192). I needed to guard against interpreting the experiences of the teachers as similar to my own and my experience of burnout. I did not disclose my burnout experience. I felt that withholding this piece would help keep the participants' words and thoughts as true to their own experience as possible. I shared that I had had similar experiences only after hearing about their experiences. Throughout my interviews, data analysis, and write-up I continued to remind myself that it was not my story that I was telling. It was the story of my participants. My hope, however, was also that their perspectives helped me reflect more deeply on my own experiences.

Conclusion

Teacher turnover is a common occurrence in our school system today. Cycling through teachers can negatively impact schools because there is little continuity in teaching practice and school culture. The purpose of this study was to better understand the reasons teachers leave their classrooms and the teaching profession after serving for a only short time—between one and four years in these social justice-oriented schools. I studied a particular group of teachers that had

formed a new wave in education reform: young, idealistic, and ambitious teachers who teach for a short time in social justice–oriented schools.

It was my charge to better understand teacher turnover, and specifically the teacher turnover among movement teachers who taught in social justice–oriented schools. The research projected four possible exit motives that helped me understand the phenomenon and how teachers might end up leaving the classroom. The four patterns could not be clearly distinguished in real life and were meant to be ideal-types. The four motives articulated a gradual continuum from the individual choosing to leave to the individual having to leave. This framework allowed me to discover finer nuances between the patterns that more accurately reflect the real-life experiences of a select group of movement teachers.

Chapter 3: Findings Across Cases

Broad Analysis

The purpose of my research is to better understand teacher turnover among the teachers that I initially and provisionally characterized as young, idealistic, and social justice–oriented. These teachers staff many of the most challenging urban charter and public schools. They often enter the field with enthusiasm and appear committed to a cause (Foote, 2008; Quartz, 2003), but then leave the classroom after only a short time.

Initially I hypothesized four main exit motives and was open to learning about others. My conceptual framework depicts four exit motives distilled from the research base. One motive for leaving, seemingly less related to teaching per se, stems from the sociological fact that today’s career paths tend to be flexible, and changing professions may be a “normal” occurrence for today’s generation. Another motive, pervasive for generations of new teachers, is the experience of shock when confronted with the realities of teaching. I hypothesized a third exit motive in relation to the fact that often the sphere in which the teachers work presents itself as a “movement” for social justice. For teachers who presumably have joined schools as part of a movement, a different kind of disillusionment may be at play: these teachers may experience a rapid shift from high-pitch idealism to rude awakenings and rapid disappointments once confronted with the reality of their work experience—a reality that may belie the professed commitment to social justice, fairness, and equity. Finally, I hypothesized that teachers may leave not simply because of disillusionment, but because they experience burnout due to the relentless pace and intensity of an unregulated and high-performance–oriented work place set in exceptionally difficult social contexts. Burnout would occur when young teachers tried to stick to their ideals and commitments beyond their capacity to withstand the adversities of this work context.

The data revealed an entrance motive of a particular pro-social mindset among the participants. The pro-social mindset was typically coupled with a second entrance motive, that of trying out education as a career while holding on to the idea of pursuing other careers if it did not fulfill expectations. Although there were other entrance motives, entering education with a pro-social mindset with both hope and uncertainty was most prevalent.

As there were strong common entrance motives, there were also common exit motives. The majority of the participants described two motives: feeling exhausted, coupled with a loss of passion and excitement for the classroom. The third most common exit motive was a loss of social connections with administrators, colleagues, and students, and diminished personal relationships.

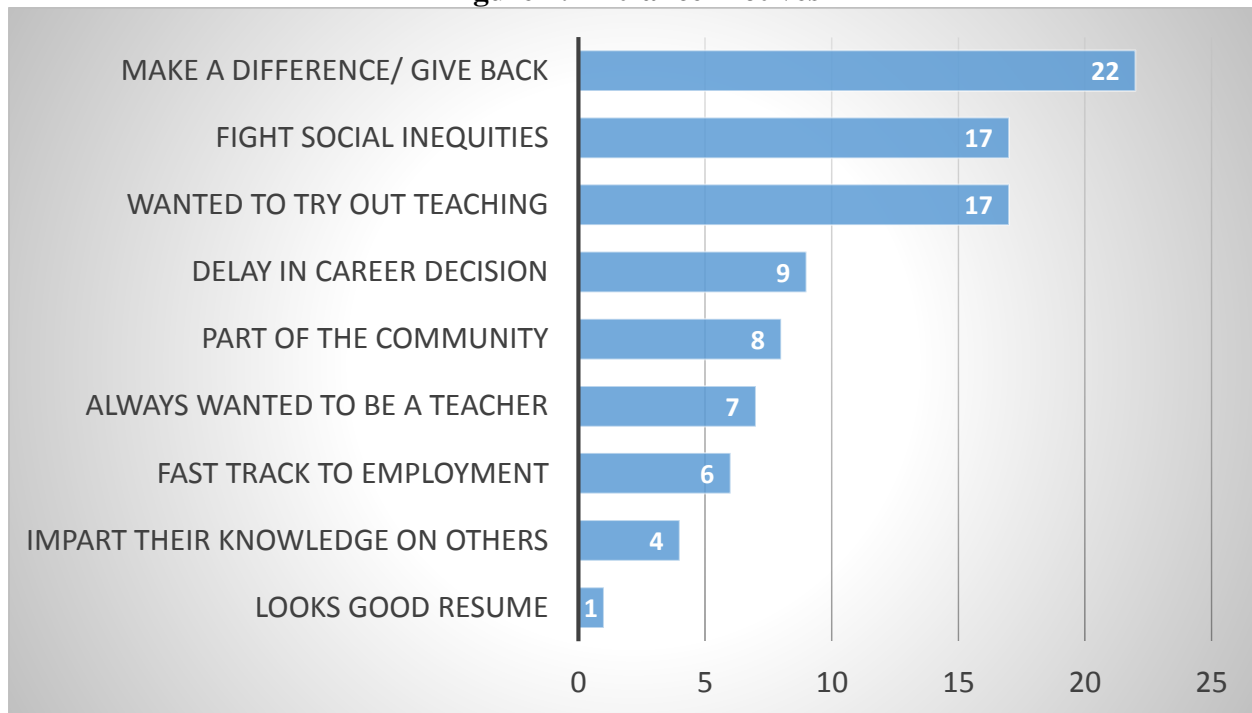
The entrance and exit motives that surfaced from the participants' reflections had a connection to each other. The participants were pro-socially minded and wanted to make an impact on the world and at the same time were only committing temporarily to the classroom. Their career uncertainty speaks to the exit motive of career flexibility. The participants knew that they had options. A lifelong career was not predetermined, nor was it mentioned as a future goal. The majority of the participants had an exit option in mind at the start of entering the classroom. The expected career flexibility available to them spoke to their career uncertainty upon entrance. Dipping one's toe in the water might be a repeated strategy as they figured out what best suited them. The advantage of career flexibility and their career uncertainty upon entrance clearly played into their low level of commitment to teaching. This partial commitment, coupled with the reality shock of the classroom, left them exhausted and less passionate and energized than when they were entering, and ultimately led to their exit.

Two of the four exit motives, career flexibility and reality shock, closely matched the articulated reasons for departure from the classroom. The other two motives, movement disillusionment and burnout, did not appear to contribute to teachers leaving the classroom.

Entrance Motives

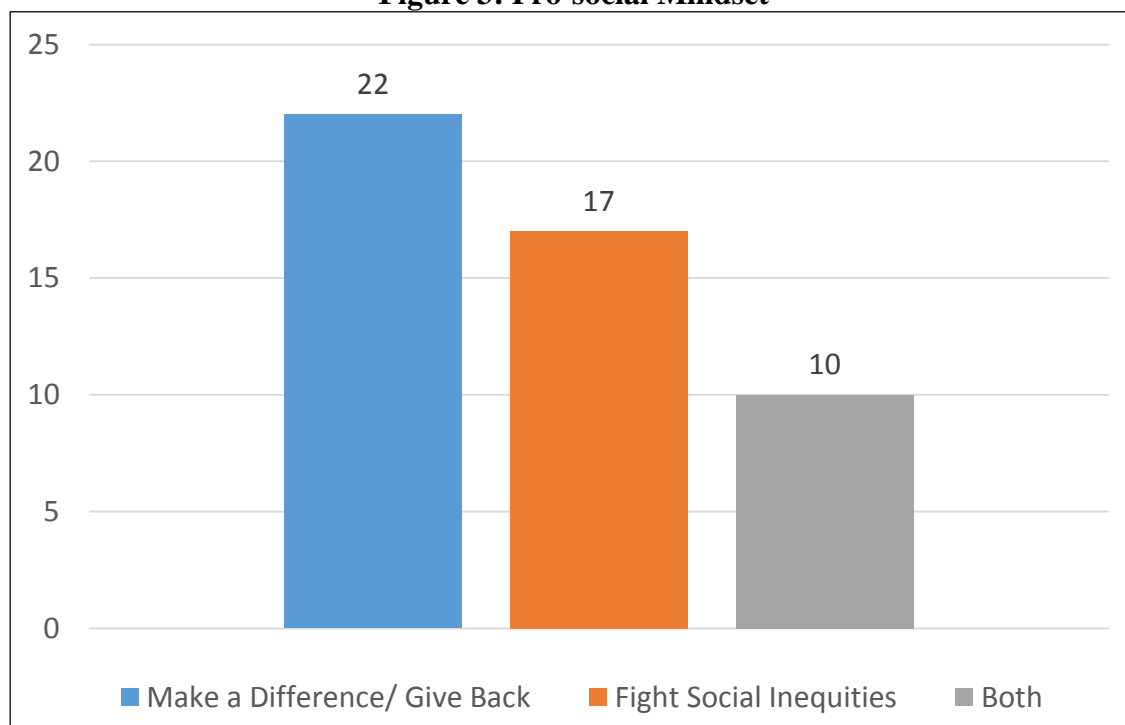
It made sense to first explore the entrance motives in order to better understand what made teachers leave their classrooms.

A variety of closely related entrance motives emerged from the data. As shown in Figure 1 below, the motives described by the participants fell into nine categories, which varied in prevalence. Figure 2 lists motives from most to least frequent. The display distinguishes between three motives: making a difference or wanting to give back, combating social inequities, and a curiosity to try out teaching. Two-thirds of the participants reported at least two or all three as motives for entering the classroom. A fourth motive tied closely with trying out teaching stuck out for a significant portion of participants. For a large portion of teachers, trying out teaching for a couple of years could delay their more permanent decision for a career.

Figure 2: Entrance Motives

The four prevalent motives fall into two constructs. One is a pro-social mindset and the other, career uncertainty. The articulated desire to try out teaching as a way to make a difference and put off a more permanent career decision bridged the first motive construct with the second. I will describe these interrelated constructs as the modal entrance motive, beginning with bar graphs. I treat all frequencies as fuzzy indications of strength, not as accurate quantitative measures.

Entrance Motive: Pro-social Mindset

Figure 3: Pro-social Mindset

A significant number of the individuals had a passion to give back, make a difference, and be impactful. This passion was strong and, although idealistic, these individuals chose to pursue this passion as their first career outside of college. The passion came through different avenues. The majority of participants wanted a “career that has some sort of social good component to it, or that helps people” (Scott).

Giving back was defined as making an impact, providing a service, or making the place better than one found it. Making a difference was the most prevalent entrance motive. One participant equated the feeling to a Steve Jobs quote, “I feel like that phrase, ‘to make a dent in the universe,’ it kind of rings true. . . . I want to be meaningful in some way” (Steve).

Other individuals had always had a sense of fairness, were bothered by the inequities that they were aware of and wanted to help right the wrongs. “I wanted to work for the good guys....and teaching seemed like a good direction for me...and it was definitely social justice road that have me riled up at this end of my adolescence” (Cate).

There was a small group who saw themselves as part of the community that they were serving. These individuals came from backgrounds in which they had faced social inequities personally, and they felt a responsibility to make the world a better place for their own community.

The pattern of young people going to a university and dropping out, I wanted to break that, or there not being that many there in the first place. So I wanted to be like a secondary educator, also being a person of color who can also present different options, and definitely college being one of those options. Inherently, I think as a people, we're capable. It's tougher on us to do that, I think the deck has been stacked against us, but it's definitely possible (Trent).

Another prevalent and closely related entrance motive was changing the world by impacting the current social inequities for the better. One participant stated that she knew

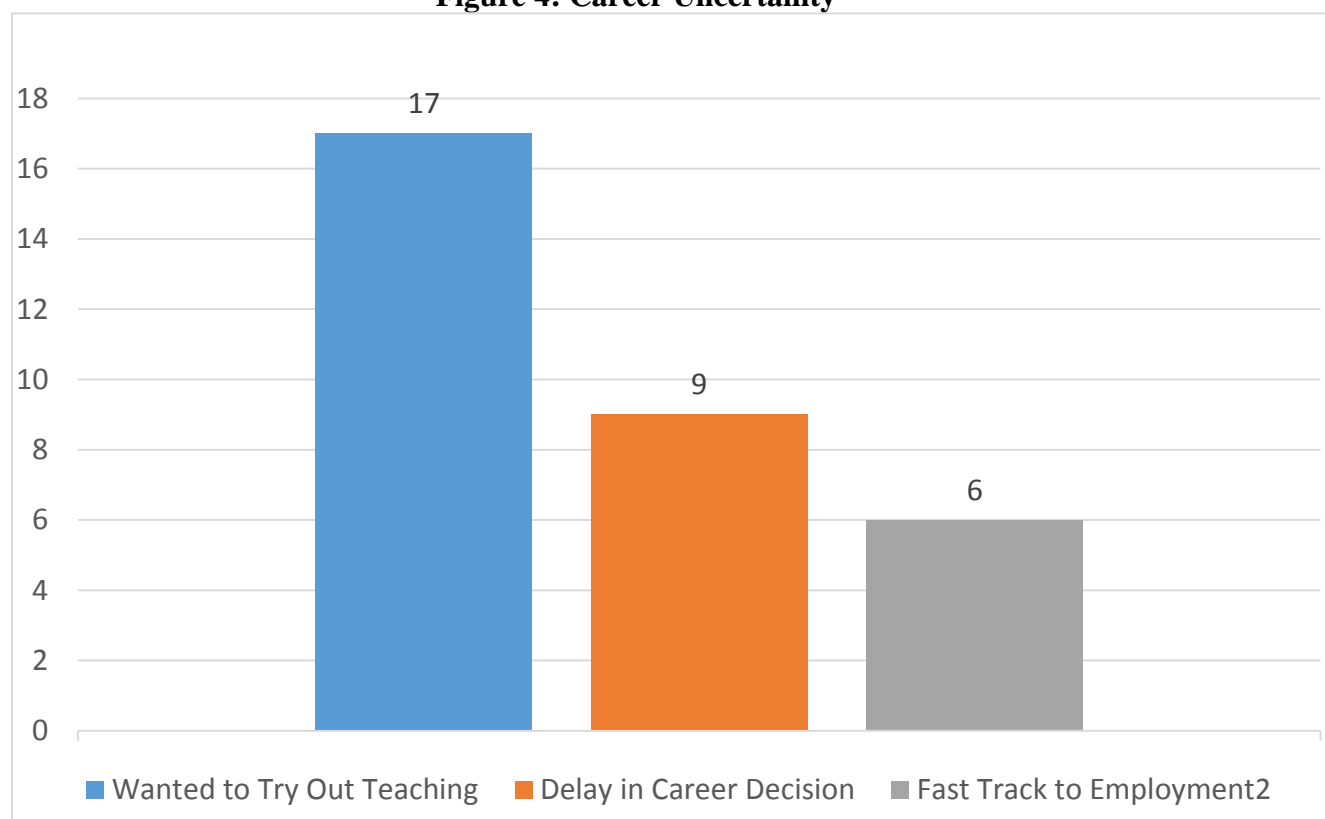
“...even as a kid... ‘That's not fair, you're not getting what you need.’... just a feeling of ‘This isn't right, we all should have the same opportunities regardless of what you're born into’” (Cate). Another said, “I started really seeing inequities in American society...and that kind of started sparking me towards working towards social justice” (Trent).

Participants articulated that they gained understandings of social and economic inequities either through personal experience or college classes that exposed current educational and economic disparities. One woman declared “[Not only] seeing an injustice, but layers of historical injustices and privilege and understanding, learning about all of that” (Patricia). And another said, “I would say I was definitely most passionate—and I still am—when it comes to racial and ethnic inequalities in the U.S. and even beyond” (Isbella).

Some of the participants named education as the way to solve these inequities, while others wanted to experience these disparities first hand through experience in the classroom. One participant said, “I wanted a job that would make a difference, and teaching seemed the most concrete way” (Eileen).

Entrance Motive: Career Uncertainty

Figure 4: Career Uncertainty



As pronounced a motive as working toward social equity was a desire to try out teaching, because participants could jump right into the workforce without investing much time or money. They also did not know if they would stay with it.

I applied to a couple of credentialing schools, but going to credentialing school I would not be getting an income while getting my credential, versus Teach For America, I would be getting an income while also working toward a credential (Eileen).

I would rather be making money straight out of college than spending more of my parents' money on a degree that they were not in favor of to begin with. So I applied for Teach For America, I applied early in my senior year, I got in (Amanda).

The number of people who said they had always wanted to be a teacher equaled the number who stated they never believed they would be in the classroom after one or two years. This split demonstrates that the profession was not the common link between these participants. Instead it was the opportunity to jump into a job, immediately gain experience, and get paid for it— in a way that was pro-social.

I was so nervous about committing to life career decisions at the age of 22, I just wasn't ready to do that. Teach For America was in many ways a way to kick that decision down the road, and also to do something meaningful (Steve).

Teaching was perceived as something they could do without serious training, in contrast to becoming a doctor. Two participants explained why they chose the alternative route to the classroom. One stated, “I didn't want to go for the school for that long, I thought it was too much..” and another said the alternative route (a local New Teacher Project Teaching Fellows program) “was appealing to me because they kind of fast-tracked me into the classroom, and it was less risk for me because I wasn't having to invest a year of my life to decide if I wanted this or not” (Olivia).

Joining an alternative program like Teach For America was a short-term commitment and allowed one woman to “(figure) out along the way that (if) it wasn't the right fit for me, it was two years and then I can go to grad school and pursue something else” (Zella). A mid-career entrant expressed his decision to join TFA. “I'm young enough in my career where I can take at least two years off and if I end up loving being a teacher, then I will continue being a teacher” (Brandon).

Many of the participants had no idea what they wanted to do after college. They described a state of peril in which they waited till the last minute and were dragged by friends to go to the TFA interview process. One participant stated,

I was like, “I don't know if Teach for America is for me.” But I worked for the college newspaper. And a girl I worked with was like, “I'm going to this TFA interview, you should go with me.” I was like, “No.” She was like, “No, you should go with me, there's pizza.” “Oh, okay,” and I went, and I fell in love with it from the presentation (Sam).

These individuals thought that teaching would not hurt their later pursuits because it was a service they were giving. The Teach For America program is highly regarded as accepting only the top tier students from the best four-year universities, with an ambitious, relentless desire to be successful and give back. There was an aspect of thinking about how this prestigious organization might help launch their career. A program like TFA or the Peace Corps would allow the interviewees to put something on a resume that would reflect positively on them, and by the end of one or two years they would move on to their next career. One of the participants described it this way:

Teach For America offered me a way into teaching because I was passionate about education that came with some status. Or at least I perceived it that way. So yeah, I thought, “Wonderful.” . . . “Sweet, I can do this for two years and I can figure out what's next, I'll go to graduate school” (Brooke).

Often coupled with not knowing what to do was a motive of delaying a career decision by entering into this temporary assignment. “I’ll have two more years to decide what I am doing” (Sara). They were attracted to the fast route to employment and the low investment of time and money it offered. Joining a program like TFA allowed them to enter the field quickly and easily with little commitment to the profession. TFA offered an alternative route to a traditional teaching credential, and a fast track to start working, making money, and allowing more time to consider other options.

In sum, the thirty participants I interviewed entered the teaching profession with overlapping motives. The most prevalent entrance motive was a pro-social mindset: wanting to make a difference in the world. Teaching was seen as a way to confront and combat social inequities, and participants wanted to try out teaching as a way to fulfill this desire. But taking it up was on a trial basis. Only a few teachers went through the traditional education preparatory programs to receive their teaching credential. The majority of them joined programs like Teach For America or a New Teacher Project Teaching Fellows program, which allowed them a fast track to employment and little commitment of time and money. Although the entrance motives of the participants varied, the nature of the entrance motives and circumstances of entry positioned them for rapid departure.

Exit Motives

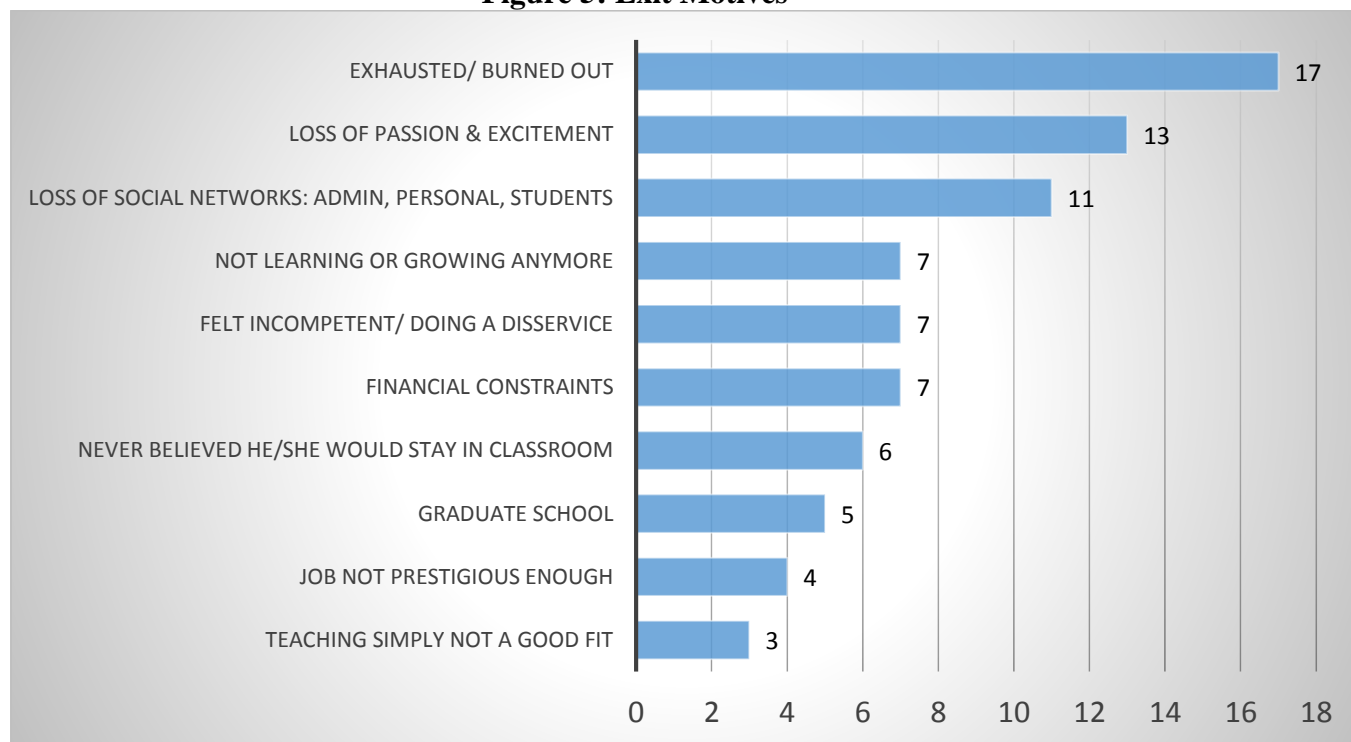
Nearly all of the thirty participants entered the classroom excited and passionate in their first and second years. However, many left after their second or third year. The few who stayed in the classroom moved to different, less challenging work environments, hoping for a better, more sustainable fit. Many of the teachers recognized that they were new to the profession and not particularly effective, and had lots to learn; but they did not stay long enough to do this learning.

Almost two-thirds of the participants were still in the field of education at the time of interviewing. But only six people out of thirty were still teaching: four in public school classrooms, two in private school classrooms. Nearly half of the participants were working in public or charter sectors of education, but not as classroom teachers.

At the time of the interviews, the majority of these teachers still professed a pro-social mindset and many are still in the field of education working as instructional coaches or administrators. When asked why they left the classroom, the majority said they were exhausted, could not do it anymore, had lost the excitement for the work, felt increasingly isolated, and felt defeated.

When asked what would have made them stay in education, the first response of a majority of the teachers was that they would stay if they had a more sustainable work environment. A close second response was higher pay. Higher pay, however, was never the only reason. Higher pay was a small incentive that would perhaps have helped make their exhaustion more bearable. “A higher pay would make the workload worth it. I don’t know if the workload could realistically go down...” (Eileen). But this second response does point to economic reasons for not committing to classroom teaching.

Similar to the entrance motives, a variety of closely related exit motives emerged from the data. As shown in Figure 5 below, the participants offered a number of reasons for leaving. Exit motives were overlapping, and multiple reasons were named. The majority of the participants articulated five or six contributing factors. As with the entrance motives, I grouped the multiple overlapping exit motives into three large categories.

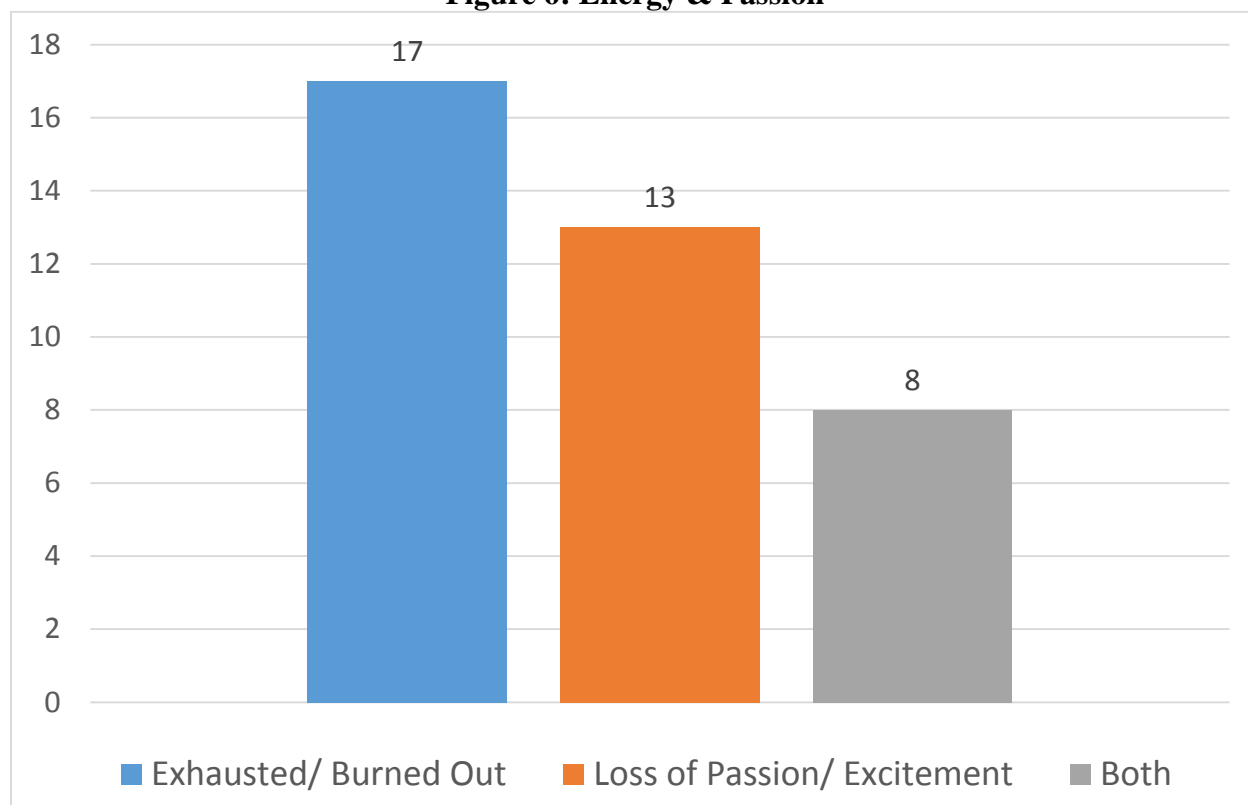
Figure 5: Exit Motives

The two largest categories were exhaustion and a loss of energy and passion. The majority of the participants named these two exit motives together. Participants often claimed three or four of the variables above to explain their reasons for leaving. I found three larger themes.

I named the three themes *energy and passion*, *self-concept*, and *context*. The exit motives surrounding energy and passion include both the exhaustion and loss of passion and energy. The second group of exit motives involved the self-concept of the individuals, such as feeling that they were not learning or growing, feeling incompetent or doing a disservice rather than a service to the students, and feeling that the job was not prestigious enough for them personally and professionally. The last theme was related to the context of the work environment, namely alienation from social connections with administrators, colleagues, personal relations, and students. The purpose of grouping the exit motives into larger themes is to show broader patterns.

Exit Motive: Loss of Energy and Passion

The most prevalent articulated exit motive was exhaustion. Individuals reported both physical and emotional consequences of their work life. Two individuals had illnesses that were exacerbated by the work and had to leave the classroom by doctors' orders.

Figure 6: Energy & Passion

Some of the participants spoke to the weight of the job and feeling that they were failing if they could not reach all of their students. They had unrealistic expectations for themselves to bring every student up to grade level no matter how far behind the students were. If they were unable to meet these expectations, they viewed themselves as incompetent and felt guilty about it as if they were not only letting themselves down, but also all of their students and colleagues.

Teaching is the hardest job I have ever had, and will ever have. I don't think I ever knew how hard it was going to be... I just think that teaching is so heavy... I felt like the weight of the world was on me, and that I had twenty-two kids relying on me to put out my very best all the time. That was heavy. I wish it wasn't so hard (Whitney).

I know that's why I was only in the classroom for three years, because I worked my ass off thinking that if any kid was failing it was my fault. So I was exhausted. That's not sustainable, you can't have a teacher like that for forty years, it's not going to happen. I really struggled with that, and that's why I really knew I needed to leave the classroom. . . . I just felt like I got burnt out. I taught as hard as I could for three years, and that was all that I could do . . . every day, being emotionally invested in each student's progress, and working really hard to make new and creative lessons even though I had two years' worth of curriculum created, revamping everything, trying to make it always better no matter what. Planning until 9 o'clock at night and then waking up in the morning to make my copies, and then planning during my prep or during my lunch and calling home every night for at least three kids (Brandy).

Others described the amount of time that teaching involved. Many sought a more balanced or sustainable life.

My first year I remember waking up three or four in the morning, even after staying up till eleven the night before, working straight, waking up early, doing last-minute grading or plans before the school started. I had the stamina then, I don't have that anymore (Eileen).

I was just tired. Sick of having maybe one day off a week. I would work Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, from the time I woke up to the time I went to bed. Then on Saturdays, then maybe have Saturday night, and then Sunday I worked. Most weekends. Some days I would just be like, "No, I'm going to take Saturday off" (Brandon).

A handful of the participants explained their exhaustion by saying they were so consumed by the work that their personal relationships suffered. Some relationships were on the verge of ending owing to the lack of time and compassion they could give to their partners. One described the stress caused by "not being able to spend a lot of time with (his) partner or with (his) friends" and stated that he "became distant with people" (Hannah). Another explained his experience trying to manage his relationship:

Having a partner who was like, "Are you going to be able to hang out today? Is there anything I can do for you?" That was really hard on me, it felt like I owed him some time, I needed to spend personal time with him (Sam).

Nearly all these teachers described losing themselves to the work. Activities that they once did for hobbies or simply fun were dropped owing to the amount of work. Many commented on sacrificing their health because of high stress, lack of sleep, and eating abnormalities. Many said they were just trying to survive the next day.

But I also just felt like I needed time for myself. I'm a reader, I love to read, I stopped reading. When I talked to my mom about that, she was like, "That's sort of a red flag." I stopped reading. Those types of things bothered me, I had no time for anything but teaching. If I wasn't lesson planning I was grading, if I wasn't grading I was updating my grade book. If I wasn't doing that I was trying to focus on specific students and calling their parents. Just doing that stuff that comes with teaching. . . . It just felt like I had no time for anything but the job, and it got to a point where it wasn't worth it. It sounds awful to say that, but it was like, "I need a life" (Sam).

One participant described how emotionally distraught she became.

I just burned out. It got to a point . . . it was just so frustrating. I was 24 and I was like working my ass off to plan this lesson and then they just... It got to the point where it was [unhealthy]. I would start, driving to work, I would almost wish I would get into a car accident, just chuck it all, hit the median, I'd rather be in the hospital than go work. When that started to happen I was like, "This is really unhealthy, I need to leave" (Rachel).

This individual went on to relate that she also blamed herself for being unsuccessful. She said, "I'm not good at failing, so that feeling of failure on a daily basis was just demoralizing" (Rachel).

Another participant explained how amazed she was by the experience.

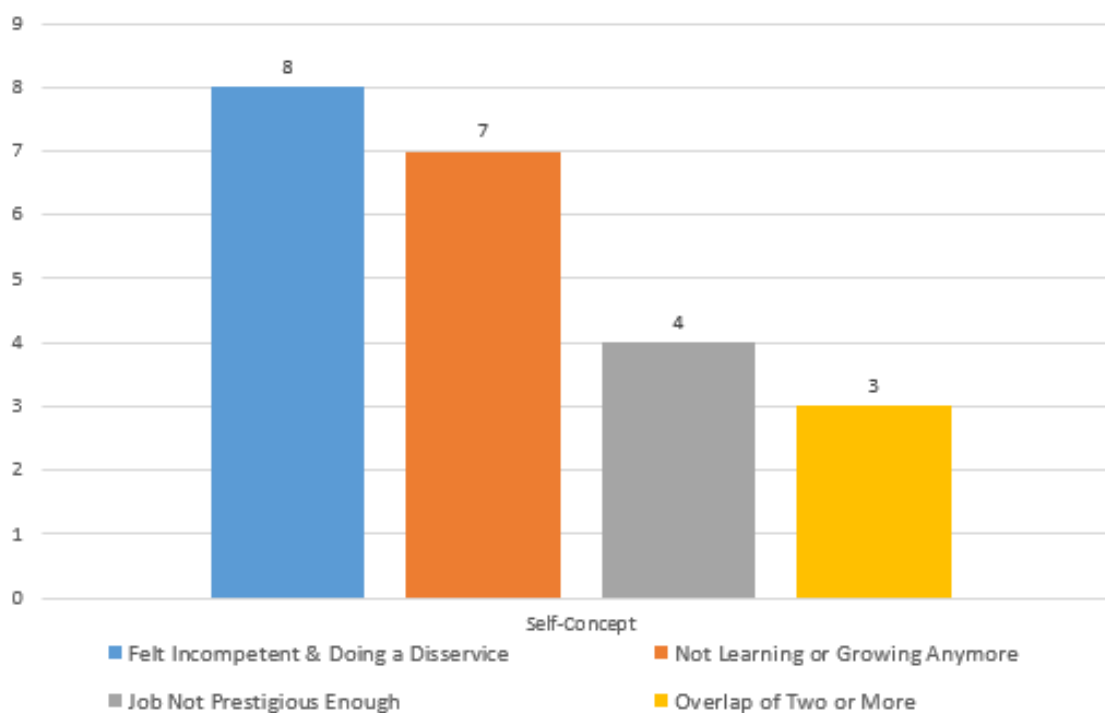
I've never had a significant challenge in my life until I did Teach For America. I never had a time where I failed at something I really cared about. That changes you. Either you

give up and go do something else, or you realize you have to be a stronger person, you have to be a better person (Hannah).

These two individuals clearly expressed a change in how they viewed themselves. They were faced with something that forced them to redefine themselves. These two described not only being exhausted by the work, but also experiencing a shift in their self-concept. The exit motive “loss of passion and energy” overlaps with the shift in self-concept or self-identity. The majority of the participants describe both exhaustion and a sense of having to redefine themselves as incompetent or failures.

Exit Motive: Shift in Self-Concept or Self-Identity

Figure 7: Self-Concept



The change in self-concept led to frustration and even anger with themselves. Some felt that they would do a disservice to the students and staff if they remained on the job:

Trying to reach kids and failing over and over again. It was taking a toll, that made it seem impossible to stay, or it started to seem futile. I wasn't sure; “Am I going to waste two more years of my life and fighting as hard as I can and then not succeeding?” You start to wonder if... it's not actually possible, why are you doing it (Sara)?

Another teacher remembered in his second year,

I was feeling like I was having either no impact or a negative impact on some of my students because of all the dynamics of what was happening my first year. . . . but my second year I still didn't develop the sense of, “Am I making a difference?” (Carson).

The concept of failing or doing a disservice was articulated by many participants in addition to their feeling as if they were no longer growing professionally.

They felt they had been learning “a ton” in their first year or two, but beyond that they felt stagnant. One woman stated, “I felt like I stopped growing. I wanted to keep learning and I wasn't getting that, I wasn't being fed in that way” (Elizabeth). After a short while, many participants in the study said that they no longer felt excited and/or challenged by their work. One participant stated, “I felt like I wasn't doing anything new, it was going to be the same year, different cast of kids, new leaders that I didn't feel confident about” (NC#2). Another participant explained, “I felt like that zest and excitement of building a new school and creating a new program and helping kids apply to college and seeing where they would get in, all that wasn't quite as strong anymore . . .” (Zella).

A few of the participants commented on the lack of intellectual stimulation they felt. Teaching is a complex endeavor with many competing components such as content knowledge, student learning theories, student–teacher relationships, curriculum delivery strategies, and student engagement. Yet the participants did not see or realize the complexities of teaching as challenges that could make them strive. Instead they described a lack of stimulation and a dearth of areas in which to learn and grow.

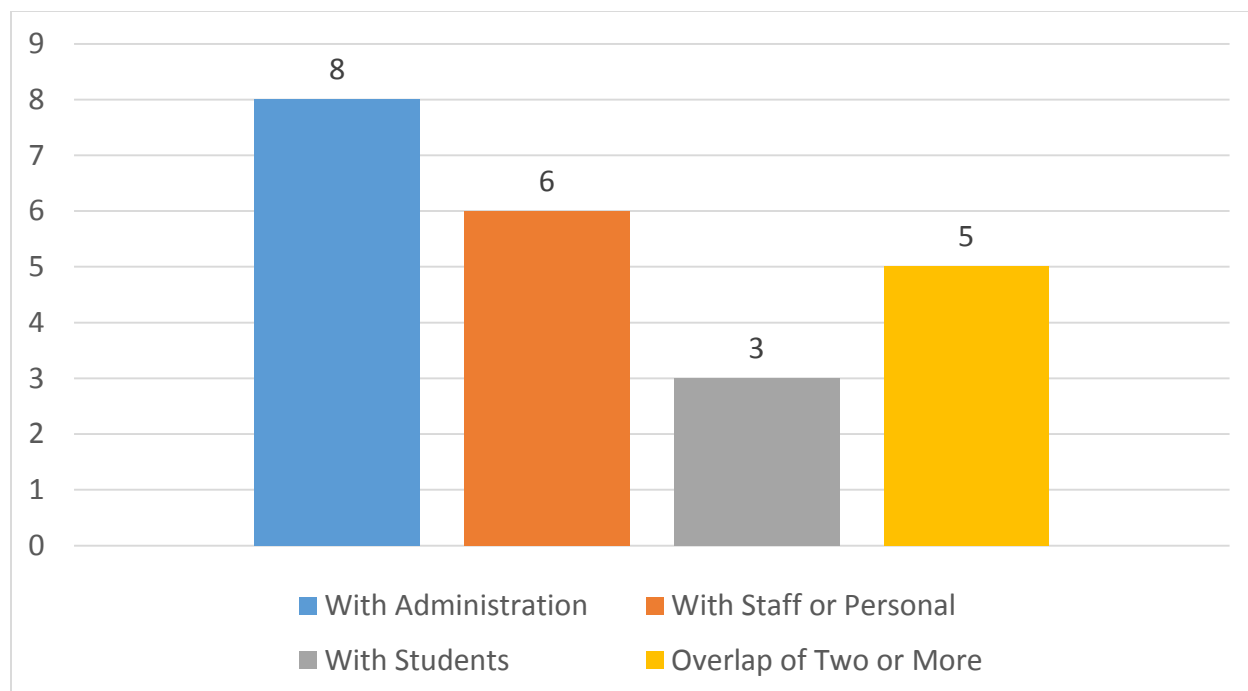
I missed academics. . . . I missed more challenging material. And learning. . . . I think for me teaching was certainly a challenge but I don't think for me it was like a super academic, really. . . . I was still learning teaching strategies and how to be effective, and how to reflect, how to get my students to reflect . . . I constantly read blogs and research articles in education stuff, but I think Maybe it was just like new academic stuff is what I think I was wanting. And I was always a science and math guy, so I was craving that. How do I make more use of this science and math background, besides just teaching the concept of mathematics? (Scott)

The majority who felt a shift in their self-concept or identity had parallel feelings of incompetence and being “bored” or “not feeling challenged anymore.” It is possible that these teachers felt a loss in motivation to learn because of their feeling of failure or incompetency. Possibly having a mask of defeat, they were articulating that they needed a more stimulating environment to fuel their motivation to grow. Instead of seeing a challenging experience as a learning opportunity, they had a fixed mindset and could not confront the possibility of not being successful. Another possibility is that they lost their motivation to learn as they lost their energy. If one is trying to make it day to day, it could be difficult to see avenues along which to push oneself and learn. Rather than face the possibility of being incompetent or feeling defeated and paralyzed, the blame was placed on the work setting for not being stimulating or challenging enough to keep participants engaged.

Placing the responsibility on the work setting for not meeting their desire to learn and grow blended into the other exit motives involving the work place context.

Exit Motive: Loss of Social Networks

Figure 8: Loss of Social Networks



The data revealed a pronounced frustration with the work environment in a few different ways. Almost half of the participants experienced a loss of relationships. The relationships that most often became a challenge were with administrators. The next most common were either personal relationships or those with colleagues. Finally, three participants felt a disconnection with the students. I am grouping these three different types of relationships together because they fall under the same context of loss of social connections and are not separate motives for exiting.

The time and energy that was needed during the first and second years of teaching put a strain on all participants' social lives. One participant laughed a little as he explained to me his experience with his friends during his first year of teaching:

I always kind of joked with my friends that when August rolls around, I will not see you until May. I'm sorry, you're not gonna see me, it's such a life-consuming profession. It put real stress on me and my relationships, so it was hard for me to continue....It's hard, it's a lot of time and work and effort. It put a lot of stress on not just me but my relationships, not being able to spend a lot of time with my partner or with my friends. I sort of became distant with people, it was hard (Brandon).

The personal relationships that were compromised took an emotional toll on the participants, causing them to rethink how they were living their lives. Relationships with colleagues at work and in particular administrators also took a toll on many of the participants. One teacher felt disconnected from many of the students and administrators culturally. She was Chinese and had had a very different upbringing and school situation:

I felt that it was hard as an Asian teacher to work in a predominantly Hispanic or African American environment. I had no clue that was the case. For me, I was just trying to teach the content. But then it comes, being Asian there are certain stereotypes about you that I did not know. I think it was hard for students to respect me as a teacher. It's hard for them to respect anybody in a particular age group anyway, right? Because of their attitude toward math, or their pre-assumptions about math, and me being Asian, they

seemed to feel that that's an Asian subject, it makes the relationships more difficult (Chun).

One incident in particular, she said, was the point at which she decided that she was not understood, heard, or supported by the administrators and needed to leave the school.

There was a parent-teacher conference that really changed my mind. In the conference there was a student who had a history of being disrespectful. So basically (the parent) sat there and gave me a thirty-minute lecture about how bad I was...Not one admin stepped in and said anything about me that supported me. That conference was me and admin and parents, so they just let me sit there and be berated for the whole time...I felt I don't have support....It could have been a person stepping in and saying, "This is not about you venting, it's about we want to work together to help your child succeed." That child [did leave], not because of me but because of his long history of absences and emotional difficulty. However, that left me thinking, "Do they understand how I feel?" and if that's the right place for me (Chun).

Another first year teacher remembered that he had always had a difficult time connecting with the students. He is African American and taught in a school that served predominantly African American and Latino students. He describes his relationships with some of the students:

There's some kids that I just really was never able to connect with. There were some kids, a few, very few students, who I just refused to... They refused to acknowledge me as their teacher, and I couldn't really acknowledge them as my student. It was like, "They're not learning from me, they refuse to learn from me, I am exhausted by the different ways that I've tried to connect with the student," and I just gave up. I don't know. It was like, "I have no idea how I can teach this student" (Carson).

An interesting difficulty came up with four participants. These teachers went into teaching believing that teaching was about delivering content and not about developing relationships with students. The teachers had a hard time dealing with classroom culture and management. They did not feel that it was their job to manage. They just wanted to teach their curriculum. One woman stated,

I know classroom management is part of teaching, but I don't see it as part of instruction. It's something that took up sixty percent of my time that I would have rather spent creating really awesome things for my students to [concentrate] on and do... there were so many negative things we could talk about at the end of the day about the interruptions in our classrooms and all of these things. I didn't want to be in an environment where that would be my day-to-day conversations (Sophia).

The four individuals loved their content and curriculum, but were discouraged by the apathy they felt from the students and the need to manage their classroom daily. Classroom management relies so much on building relationships with students that if relationship-building was not seen as part of the job or an important factor, it was seen as an exhausting and nearly unbearable nuisance.

In sum, three exit motives emerged from the data. These motives had overlapping qualities and were often described in conjunction in participants' explanations of why they left the classroom. Three larger themes emerged that captured the common stories. One was feeling

exhausted. Another was confronting a new sense of self that was not expected. The third was about the work context and loss of connections felt towards others.

In reflecting on the four hypothesized motives—career planning, reality shock, movement disillusionment, and burnout—it is clear that a combination of reality shock and career planning match the stories of the participants. The participants came in to the classroom wanting and expecting to be able to make a difference in the inequities they saw in society. They were also excited by the idea of a challenge, but they knew that they were in control of planning their careers. They were only dipping their feet into the work of teaching. They always knew that there was a possible exit if it were not a good fit. Their high-pitch idealism was possibly outweighed by an individualistic mindset. If they had joined the profession thinking they were part of a collective calling aimed at changing society, maybe they could have “survived the trenches” of the first- and second-year teaching. However, they came in as individuals with a strong sense of self. Their pro-social idealism never waned: the majority of the participants continued in the education profession. However, the reality shock of inner-city classroom work and participants’ desire and ability to drive the course of their life made leaving the classroom easy.

Collective Versus Individualistic Mindset

The patterns I found dispel the notion of collective movement motives. Instead, I found that the teachers had a far more individualistic mindset upon exiting. There was an initial passion to make a difference in the world, but it was clear that very few saw themselves as part of a collective group. Instead many of these teachers felt a personal calling to give back and make a difference in the lives of those less fortunate. They believed that they could make an impact individually. This individualistic mindset continued through their teaching experience and ultimately led to a decision to leave the classroom. They left in order to move on with their lives in a healthier manner, to get out of the perceived trenches of the classroom, and to move on with their careers. For the most part teachers remained focused on what they felt was best for them and committed to what they felt drawn to. They left their jobs when the work environment no longer fueled their passion, energy, and excitement. They chose to pursue different paths that would be better for them personally and professionally. Exiting the classroom did not come without strong emotions, as the participants still felt committed to making a difference in the world. Many felt like they were succumbing to selfishness or failure; however, the fact that they had known all along they could exit easily and were not sure of this profession in the first place made it possible to make this decision without being unduly demoralized.

As to entrance motives, it was difficult to distinguish between a collective mindset and an individualistic mindset because the notion of combating social inequities may speak to a collective orientation. Collective orientations were indicated when interviewees used phrases such as “joining a movement” or “being part of something bigger than myself.” However, very few used such phrases. The few that spoke to this collective mindset also stated that “it was a good direction for me...and it was definitely the social justice road that had me riled up at this end of my adolescence” (Cate). Common phrases associated with “making a difference” or “contributing to social change” were “I expected to be impactful in some way” (Steve); “I want to live an ethical life” (Chun); “I like feeling I am of use” (Sam); “I wanted to do something that would help people and would be challenging and exciting” (Sara); “...I want to (contribute) to society in some way” (Rachel); “I wanted to open people’s minds in the same way that my teachers did for me” (Whitney); “I am going to go somewhere where I can make a difference”

(Scott); “I don’t really care what I do, I just want to do something that has the potential for some kind of impact on the world” (Danie).

The majority spoke to their specific desires as individuals. They did not refer to a larger collective movement. It was more an idealism of achieving social justice through choosing a next step that was pro-social and could not only allow them to feel good individually but also help them professionally.

The individualistic mindset was further confirmed through the participants’ teaching experiences and what finally pushed them to leave the classroom. The majority articulated a loss of passion and energy. Although only a few cases met Maslach and Jackson’s definition of burnout (a combination of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished sense of accomplishment), several stated they were burned out by their teaching experience. Although participants shared this feeling of exhaustion, a number of other factors added to the exhaustion, such as loss of relationships, a feeling of not learning anymore, and losing a sense of themselves in the midst of the work. These experiences were too complex to fall into just one category. Instead, the participants described reasons for leaving that touched on a number of elements from several categories.

Interviewees used the term burnout, but what they described was a general sense of exhaustion that usually led to relatively immediate exit before it could grow into the more severe pattern that is described in the burnout literature.

Chapter 4: Individual Cases

The following three cases highlight both the extent of contrasts and overlapping factors that surfaced in the stories of the participants. The first case follows the modal pattern I found from the participants’ stories. This case is a woman who came from a shockingly contrasting background than where she chose to teach and yet was one of the participants most passionate and deeply committed to combating social inequities. Despite her intense initial commitment, she lost her energy and passion for the work and left the classroom prematurely. The second case is one of true burnout. This case highlights how emotionally and physically exhausting teaching can be in certain contexts and how that exhaustion can have far-reaching psychological consequences. The third case tells a very different story. The story highlights what it is to be deeply committed to reforming public education in the lives of low-income students of color. This third case illustrates a collective mindset. The other two stories began with idealism and belief in tackling social justice; however, initial idealism and enthusiasm could not keep the participants in the classroom. All three cases show the complexity of each participant’s story and the true dedication and commitment all three participants had in the beginning.

Elizabeth Jones: Modal Pattern

Elizabeth had a pro-social mindset that began with experiences in high school serving children with special needs. She knew that she wanted to work with people in a service capacity, but it was after taking some education courses that teaching became the avenue through which to do that. Liz explained, “My whole world just opened up....I just wanted to make [an impact], and I knew that I wanted to do that working with kids.” In college she worked in a low-income neighboring community and tutored a student. Here she realized, “Kids are kids, and how amazing and intelligent and talented the kids I worked with were, and they were no different than I was as a kid. The fact [was] that because of where they lived, they were not going to have the same opportunities that I was afforded.” She felt a pull to making a difference in the world. Liz’s

focus was deeply embedded in making society more equitable between low-income students of color and their more affluent white and Asian peers. In contrast to other participants, Liz did not mention sharing this pro-social mindset with others in her family. She seemed to have developed and maintained this mindset from the time she was a teenager to adulthood. In college, Liz felt a calling to teach as a means through which she could work toward a more equitable society.

Liz grew up “very much in a bubble” in an affluent neighborhood. She is the daughter of a prominent professional athlete and spent much of her childhood in the spotlight with his successes. She was incredibly successful in everything she did as well. Her grades were impeccable, she was a scholar athlete in college, and always had a strong work ethic. She seemed to be an example of someone who would push herself in every aspect of her life. There was both an implicit and explicit pressure to succeed and continue to move up higher in the workplace and do more, which might have been a variable in Liz’s decision to leave the classroom.

She did not have a specific time frame for how long she would be in the classroom, but she did not see herself staying there forever. Liz entered teaching committed and determined to be the best teacher she could and work hard so her students would succeed in school and beyond.

Unlike many of the participants of this study, Elizabeth took a more traditional route into teaching. She chose to go to her alma mater’s teacher preparation program, which was highly regarded as a social justice-oriented teacher preparation program. The program would allow her to get her teaching credential and a master’s degree in just twelve months. In choosing a teacher preparation program, Liz made a commitment to teaching. Education was to be her profession, and she would start in the classroom. More than other participants, Liz was hungry for the classroom and for directly working with students as a teacher. She was as passionate about student learning theories as she was about building long-lasting relationships with her kids so she could watch them later earn their college degrees.

I know all kids need good teachers, but I have absolutely no interest in teaching in the private sector. I want to serve under-served communities, I want to be where they need good teachers, and they need to believe in that and know that in their essence and their being: they are as capable as everyone else.

Liz’s commitment to build a more equitable society was her driving force, yet she was also aware of the difficulty of teaching and took finding her first school seriously.

But I also know I’m going to be a new teacher, and I need a lot of support. And I want to be able to serve the kids I’m serving well...I can’t go to a “that’s really tough and be really new and serve kids well.” So Monroe (Academy) was the perfect fit where I was going to have a ton of support, serve the community I wanted to serve, and be able to be successful [as a first year teacher].

Monroe was a K–8 school that was part of a larger charter management organization and she felt it matched her teacher preparation program’s social justice ideals and mission. She visited the school before she accepted the teaching position and saw that teachers were actually putting theory to practice in terms of employing best instructional practices.

Monroe, it was the first school I had been in that reflected what I had been taught. A lot of the schools I had been in, they weren’t doing readers workshop, they weren’t doing writers workshop, they weren’t doing a lot of these strong instructional practices that I was learning about. So I was having this difficult connection; “This is what I’m learning, but this isn’t what I’m seeing.” Then going to Monroe all of a sudden I was seeing strong instructional practices, so that was really exciting.

In contrast to many other participants, Liz was actively searching for a teaching environment that best suited her rather than allowing herself to be placed by an organization into a low-income and low-performing school. Liz was in the driver's seat, which speaks to her commitment to education and social justice as well as her individualistic mindset rather than to a vision as a part of a larger collective.

Liz began teaching kindergarten and ended up moving up with her students to first grade in her second year. She then decided she wanted something new and moved to second grade. She taught second grade for two years. Liz always wanted to be challenged, and liked the newness of a new grade level every year in her first three years. Only after a second year teaching second grade was she ready to move out of the classroom.

Her teaching experience resembles a typical first-year teacher's. However, Liz had great support and collegiality from both her grade-level team and administrators.

"I worked with an awesome team, we did all of our lesson planning together, which totally saved me because I had no idea what I was supposed to be doing. I felt supported with coaching, and I really loved it. And I loved the families there, they were amazing. I did home visits every year, and I still have such amazing bonds because of home visits. That really changed the game for me."

Liz lit up when talking about the highs from her four years. The connections she made with her students and their families speaks to how committed and immersed in the culture she was. She still keeps in touch with many of the families.

A lot of my highs are my students [who] still call me all the time, and I think that I'll be a part of their life forever. And going out, all the moms in my classroom taking me out for my birthday. It really is like the relationships built are the highs. Also, I went with a group from K-1, and to finish a grade with them reading, it's like, "We did this. You came in and you didn't even know one single letter in the entire alphabet and now we're reading, we did this." Just seeing that growth is the coolest.

Amidst the highs she had many lows. Liz described how exhausting teaching was for her. Her experiences mirror that of many others that I interviewed. Although others might have deemed her successful in the classroom, she did not see it that way.

Teaching is the hardest job I have ever had, and will ever have. I don't think I ever knew how hard it was going to be. But yes. I just think that teaching is so heavy. I feel like in this job I'm in now, I work just as much as I did in teaching, but it doesn't feel so heavy.

Liz characterizes all of her lows as times when she was exhausted and felt she could not continue. She had a daily sense of failure and finally it got to be too much. It was too hard to be successful every minute of every day.

I couldn't get out of the car every single day without just praying and praying and praying, like, "This is out of my control, it's in your hands." Just a recognition of my stomach hurt every day for four years just wanting to make sure that I was serving my kids well....and ending that day knowing I didn't do my best. "I was super lazy today, and I can't afford to be lazy." So not having that space to have a bad day without it having a direct effect on kids, I think was the part that was just hard. And just being so tired. So tired and not being able to afford that, but also being so fried was hard.

Liz gave me two main reasons for leaving the classroom when I asked. The first reason was feeling that she had stopped learning and growing and the second reason was financial. These responses did not match what she described earlier. However, this dichotomy of feelings was a pattern among the participants of this study. There was exhaustion and defeat and also a

feeling of being kept from learning or doing more. It would seem that taking on anything more would be too overwhelming for an already exhausted new teacher. Yet Liz stated that she was “starving for learning and wasn’t getting that...it was a little too easy, it was becoming too natural, and I wasn’t feeling pushed.”

Liz wanted to explore other opportunities in leadership so that she could feel like she was learning and growing again. She explained that this feeling of not feeling challenged could have been reversed if she had been giving a leadership position. She remembers, “I got my (teacher effectiveness) scores back last year and I was a master teacher...but I still did not feel like I was doing enough...I made a first-year teacher’s salary for three years in a row. I made \$43,000 and I was a master teacher. That was just not okay.” She had a difficult time confronting her desire for more money because she knew she had gotten into the profession to serve under-served communities and she believed it was not about the money. She further articulated a particular feeling of shame about wanting more money.

I feel like there’s this piece where it’s like the sacrificial thing: ‘You shouldn’t need to make any money, and you should work yourself into the ground, because it’s what is best for kids,’ and you should take on that character...I don’t think people are taken seriously when they say that it’s not sustainable.

Liz, similar to other participants, was exhausted from her work and felt she needed more of a challenge. Liz demonstrates clearly how exhaustion and boredom come together. She got to the point where she prayed every day to have the strength to get out of the car and go to work and at same time felt stifled and stagnant in her professional growth.

At the time of this interview Liz was working as an instructional coach for the same charter school organization. This job change fit with wanting to be challenged in a new setting. She had tried out teaching, but it was not challenging enough. After two years she left the organization, but not education.

Sara Boyarin: Burnout Case

Sara grew up in a family with a pro-social mindset. It was an interest that Sara took with her through college and that naturally drew her to Teach For America. Her experience with Teach For America began before she was a corps member and at first she did not even want to be a teacher. “When I applied to the internship I said, I’m applying to do operations because I could never be a teacher but I still want to help this movement.” The mission spoke to her. Sara felt fueled by the student gains that corps members were making in their classrooms. Sara recalls her operations manager acknowledging the hard work of the team and their collective effort in producing student achievement gains. “At the end of the summer we had X amount of growth in five weeks...which could not have happened without you guys...you were the ones that made sure we had the systems, you made sure the trains ran on time, we absolutely could not have accomplished this without everyone on this team.” Sara decided “That makes me feel amazing, and I want to be doing that, I want to be actually teaching. When you hear they had five weeks with students and (they) are caught up, or writing their names for the first time, or finally on grade level...and that’s barely a summer.” Sara remembers being “totally sucked in...even as an intern you feel like you are contributing to the movement” and she soon believed, “I can actually do this (teach).” Sara applied, got in, and ended up teaching on a reservation in South Dakota.

Sara’s entrance motive was a combination of a pro-social mindset with a desire to discover herself. She was figuring herself out and after her two years she was open to finding new ventures. She came in with initial enthusiasm and idealism. She believed that she could

make a difference in lives of students less fortunate than herself. She was joining this organization that promised a difficult yet rewarding experience. Like many young idealists who grew up in middle- to upper-class homes and did well in school, Sara knew if she worked hard enough that her hard work would pay off and she would be able to make an impact. She was willing to take on the challenge and felt she would be successful.

Her experience stuck out among those of all the other participants because of the toll it took on her. When I interviewed her, she had been out of the classroom for a few years and still could not determine her next steps.

Sara was placed by Teach For America on an Indian reservation. She began teaching as a middle school math intervention specialist. In her second year she ended up transferring to another school on the reservation and taught high school math intervention through a blended learning program. Her two-year teaching experience was still vivid in her mind. She began tearing up several times during the interview describing memories. Her experience was traumatizing.

The Indian reservation assignment is an extreme contrast to the life that many corps members have led and few truly understand the devastatingly isolated and neglected situation of our Indian reservations. Many TFA corps members face their privilege as middle- to upper middle-class backgrounds for the first time when confronted with the poverty of the reservations.

Sara was a first-year teacher immersed in a culture that was nothing like her own, a nomadic and devastatingly impoverished, desperate community. She felt that it was her responsibility to teach her students math and believed that she could do it. Her teaching assignment was on the periphery of the school's instructional program, where she consequently was isolated professionally and socially from much-needed networks to survive such a trying experience.

My first year I was placed in... I didn't actually have a real classroom, they put me in a closet. It was like a storage closet. I guess they hadn't given any thought to where they would put this math interventionist when I finally came on board, and then they were like, "Where are we going to put you?" It seemed like they didn't think I was going to be doing any work. I think most math interventionists, especially on a Res, they just sit in an office and who knows what they do. They don't teach kids, for sure... Plus people didn't understand the challenges of being an interventionist, so they thought I was just a terrible teacher. A lot of that got back to me: "She only has three kids or four kids and she can't even control them. She's terrible."

Not having materials or curriculum was the least of her worries, when she could not even get students to come to her classroom. It was difficult to establish positive relationships with students. Often students were embarrassed for having to go to a special teacher for intervention. The school structures only exacerbated this issue for Sara.

I had to pull kids out of their free block or out of P.E. P.E. is basically recess so they hated coming to math because they were skipping recess. They felt singled out, which they were, and then there was no administrative support. So a lot of the time a kid would complain loud enough, or frequent enough, then she would just pull them out of my class, which was basically rewarding them for throwing a fit. And then more and more kids started doing that, so it was really hard, too. Classroom management is really hard. I think interventionists have a really difficult challenge and they need a lot of things; they need administrative support, they need their own schedule.

Sara described her relationship with her students as both emotionally and physically exhausting. This battle to get students to meet with her went on the entire day. There was no consistency in her day and few moments she could call successful.

Despite the lack of understanding, Sara did make close friends with colleagues. Her most challenging relationship was with the principal. The biggest conflict was over communication with the families. Sara believed that some of the families needed to be reported to child safety authorities, but her school leader responded, “We don’t do that here.” But in Sara’s eyes the children needed help, so the proper authorities needed to be called in.

Sara realized that the only experience that she could control was the little time she had with her students. When she met with her students face to face she could control the environment. Her first accomplishment was to get them into her classroom closet without the students getting angry and running out. She knew that if there was any chance of her helping students improve their math skills she had to develop strong, trusting relationships with them and prove to them that time with her was worth giving up their favorite parts of high school. Sara felt she had built this kind of relationship with a few of her students by the end of the year. She lit up and talked passionately about one such student.

I had one kid, she was the one always putting her head down, she was always giving up. She was in the lowest class, she couldn't keep up, she couldn't even add, pretty much. She just blossomed at the end of my intervention. I heard the next year that she was keeping up in her math class, she was in a regular class....she has her head up, it's amazing, she's getting answers right. So that was exciting.

Fortunately at her second site, she had great relationships with her team of three principals. Unfortunately, this placement proved even more difficult than the first. The school was an alternative school where students were placed after being expelled from other schools. Sara describes them as “literally violent, homeless kids.” She still was able to develop strong relationships with some students and considered coming back for a third year.

Her professional isolation was less at her second site, but she had an even more difficult group of students, who faced more emotional and learning challenges than those at her previous site. Despite some highs with students, Sara had many more lows during her two years. In her second year she began to fear for her life and the life of her students. Several colleagues were assaulted in the school parking lot. Although she was never directly assaulted, she experienced several terrifying ordeals. She remembers in her second year,

One of the counselors actually started reporting families, and she would have all these documents, and she was like, “I wish... I can't believe all the stuff that happens,” there was like a million illegal things that happened every day in that school. So she ended up reporting a few families for abuse, but then she drove home one day and her tires, the lug nuts had been slightly unscrewed, just enough that she would get on the highway and then crash. She [ended up crashing] before she hit the highway, thankfully.... You know what they say, it's like if you weren't speaking out you were just as bad, but there was, “If I speak out I'm going to lose my job and not even have the tiny bit of leverage that I have here.” So that was a low point for me where I saw one person actually give everything she could, her whole job was protecting these kids, keeping them safe, and this is what happened to her.

Sara seemed to relive these experiences as she described them. She seemed as if she were still in shock and could not actually believe that she had experienced such situations. Her voice cracked at moments while she recounted a horrifying night.

We were right across the street from the housing. My car was vandalized, my mirror was smashed off one night. And the horse gang came by...It's like a gang but they ride horses. They would run around and terrorize the community. They would brandish weapons and just terrorize people. (One time) they were really drunk and high, and they got our house confused with some other house and they thought that I had kidnapped their son. I was there alone and they were beating on the door. I remember thinking "I'm in the middle of nowhere, I'm hours from the city, hours from the police department." And then I called the police and they had been responding to another crime in my town, so they were there, and they came and arrested them. That was really lucky because there was only nine cops....for the entire reservation.

So that was hard, just not even the teaching, just living there, living in isolation, and also not being trusted by a community by being White, being an outsider, there's that distrust, like "Why are you here?" Then it was hard, the students were... you would get to know a few, and then sometimes you couldn't help them. You finally got them to trust you, which took months, and then they finally do trust you and you can't do anything for them. And there's no social services to point them to, to say "Oh we can get you help, we can get you into a shelter." There's not anything you can do for them. They're asking you for help, they finally trust you, you're the adult in the situation and there's not anything you can do.

Not only was she in fear for her life and job, she thought that no one would believe her when she went home. The things that happened made her question her sanity.

I once almost got punched in the face by a P.E. teacher because he confused me for a student, and then he was like laughing it off, "Oh, I thought you were a student."...I was in shock. "Did this happen?" Every night I would come home like, "[What the fuck just happened? This happened! Then this happened!]" and then I would go to sleep. I thought I would come back (home), come back to civilization (thinking) "No one's even going to believe me. No one will believe me. This is ridiculous."

Sara left the classroom from exhaustion, loss of hope, fear, and a sense of incompetence. She stated,

I think all the lows started to get to me, where it was just like being in a situation that's physically unstable, where you're not sure if it's dangerous, and then trying to reach kids and failing over and over again. It was taking a toll, that made it seem impossible to stay, or it started to seem futile.

She explained that she felt like she was breaking down emotionally. Sara described herself as "hopeless, as little hope as anyone else here...and once you become that teacher it's like you can't (stay)."

Sara's placement was particularly unstable. Her position was cut and instead of feeling like she had been released from this traumatizing experience, she considered going back to the previous reservation. At this time, even TFA decided to no longer place teachers at this school because of the danger the corps members faced. Still she was considering going back for another year, but on vacation during the summer, she remembers, "it kind of just came rushing over me, realizing, 'I can't go back because I'm exhausted. I cannot.'...I just felt like four years was too long to be unhappy.....But then instead I spent those two years feeling guilty about having left."

Sara is still not sure what she wants to do and still has vivid memories of her teaching experience on the reservation. She seems traumatized and in a sort of holding pattern after her two years out of the classroom. "Now I'm two years out of TFA and I still haven't done any

work. I realized I need to sit down and figure it out: you have all these dreams, what are you doing with your life?" Sara remains committed to staying in the field of education.

Trent Sorenson: Collective Mindset Case

Similar to the other participants, Trent was first struck by social inequities in college. He told me his college city was "a very conservative city... it was ranked second safest city in the nation by the FBI." And he went on to explain,

That means that police force are definitely out and about looking for stuff, and you have to get permission to paint your house a certain color; they can only usually be white or tan. You couldn't leave your garage door open, very planned communities. . . .

This environment was a stark contrast to where he grew up. He was used to being around many different cultures and a more working-class environment.

Going away to college and being African American, my school actually had a large Asian population, also a large Caucasian population. I went to school with Caucasians before, but this time I really felt like there was a power dynamic that I had not seen before.

The change in environments led him to start "seeing inequities in American society" and he wanted to learn more about that.

I remember coming in and noticing there weren't that many African Americans or Chicano Latinos. A lot of people make fun of us, but yes, we pretty much do all know each other. I'm talking a school of like 30,000 people and it's two percent African American and about three percent Chicano Latino. People are coming up to you first week of school introducing themselves if they're African American, that was just the norm.

He remembers it was in his third year that it started to affect him the most. He realized that half of the African American students he had entered the school with were gone. "They were no longer there, whatever reasons that might be, whether it was academics, whether it was family issues, whether it was financial, whatever, half the people I came with were gone."

Trent pursued ethnic studies and enjoyed the classes. He remembered saying, "Oh, there's a reason I feel this way. There are other people that feel similar to me, we're bound to have the same experiences.' Which wasn't always apparent in my education before."

He said that it was not till his fifth year in college that he started to think about becoming a classroom teacher.

I guess because then I started thinking I needed to make a difference with young people of color, or just people of color in general. I thought education could be the way. That was probably towards my fifth year I was in school, I started considering it.

He believed that the pattern he saw of young students of color dropping out needed to be broken and thought that teaching was a way to combat that cycle.

So I wanted to be like a secondary educator, also being a person of color who can also present different options, and definitely college being one of those options. Inherently, I think as a people, we're capable. It's tougher on us to do that, I think the deck has been stacked against us, but it's definitely possible.

Unlike the other participants in the study, Trent saw himself as part of the community he wanted to help. He was not going to serve students who were both racially and economically different from him. He saw himself as part of this community. He had lived the experience through his close friends who dropped out of college. He felt he needed to be part of the solution in breaking this pattern for young African American men.

Trent described his experience teaching in a different way than the others in the study. It was never discussed as a temporary assignment that he was trying out. He saw it as difficult but described this challenge as a reward within itself.

Ultimately I feel like I am contributing to a difference, even if it's slow, that's okay. It's got to start somewhere. I think I'm lucky to be working in an organization where a lot of people are on the same page. So I get to work with a lot of really great, and intelligent, and also passionate folks. I'm really lucky in that.

He was one of only two individuals who talked about being part of a collective. He was joining a mission for his career, not a feel-good experience that he might leave if it affected him negatively. He told me about a roommate he had during his first year of teaching who was also in education. Trent remembers his roommate saying,

“If you're thinking about getting into education you should come to the Bay Area.” He was also African American, and he says, “They're actually looking for people like us out here. Really.” He pointed me in the direction of an individual who was part of something called Diversity (Association). What it is, is work with educators of color, and basically posting their resumes in different places, then schools paid into that database to seek people out. That happened to be the only place that sought me out. So I did that.

This network directed him to the social justice-oriented charter school organization where he still works today. In describing his first years at this charter school he relayed the difficulties of working in a tough environment and the long hours that he endured. He saw his work as part of a bigger mission. He felt part of a group of like-minded people who were

Willing to do whatever it took, even if things weren't working right away, to improve and to change. We felt like the community we were trying to serve deserved it. Really, really working on that. That I really, really enjoyed, despite it being so tough.

Trent does not feel as if he left at all. He was part of a larger goal and that being in the classroom and being an administrator were both ways of working on that goal. He saw his colleagues come and go and said, “I'm not them. I'm committed to these young people. I decided to come here, to this community.” He explained that he knew the change would not be overnight, that it was a process and that “eventually it could turn around.”

When asked why he left the classroom he said that it had always been his intention to become a school leader in some capacity. When the opportunity arose at another school within the same charter school organization he transitioned out of the classroom. He felt that the school he helped build “was doing really well” and knew the other school was failing. Trent had “a hard time with that.” He stated “I have a hard time letting go and not doing anything about it.” He ended up transitioning to the new school as a dean. He does not have a clear next step other than doing whatever it takes to work with and support young people of color.

Conclusion

The three cases highlighted some differences these participants had from the others.

The first case follows the modal pattern in the sense that Liz entered the field with excitement and passion, worked hard in her four years, but then succumbed to exhaustion and paralyzing defeat, which led her to leave the classroom in search of a more sustainable and healthy job. Her curiosity contrasts with her privileged background and passion for social equity. She counters the more familiar story of the privileged white girl who wants to do good and save children by temporarily visiting their community.

The second case is a woman who suffered. Sara drove herself to her furthest point, pulled by her idealism, and hoped that her students would succeed. The successes were too few and far between to build her back up and refuel her passion and confidence. She had little support and a devastatingly difficult placement. Although her family and friends urged her to leave, she clung till the very end when her position was cut. Sara still struggled with her decision to walk away, but the last ounce of her self-survival instinct allowed her to escape.

The third case veers the furthest away from the modal pattern. Trent, an African American male, was one of only two in the entire study who spoke to a collective mindset. Although he left the classroom, he has never left the job of combating social inequities. Teaching was not what he was pursuing when he first started in the classroom. He saw a bigger picture and knew that teaching was one manner in which he could work with young people of color and slowly chip away at the task of closing the achievement and opportunity gaps.

All the participants had complex stories that contribute to a strong message that teaching is incredibly hard work which requires a strong sense of self, a supportive social network, realistic expectations, successes, and a passion that is constantly refueled by the idealistic vision that initially brought them to the work.

Chapter 5: Analysis of Findings and Conclusion

Introduction

Teacher turnover is an urgent problem in many schools serving disadvantaged populations. Many of these schools are working to close the achievement and opportunity gaps between low-income students of color and their more affluent white and Asian peers. Reform efforts strive to provide a consistently rigorous and stable academic environment for students. Constant teacher turnover impedes the development of a stable learning community, making it difficult to improve and successfully implement reform efforts.

Teacher turnover can occur for a variety of reasons, and understanding the exit motives of a particular group of teachers was the purpose of this research study. My aim was to better understand teacher turnover among a particular group of young, idealistic, social justice-oriented teachers that staff many of the most challenging urban charter schools. These teachers enter the field with excitement and appear passionately dedicated to making a difference (Foote, 2008; Quartz, 2003), but then leave the profession after a short while.

My research explored the motives of 30 teachers for entering and exiting the teaching profession. I explored these motives with narrative methods. The narrative approach allowed me to dive deeply into the participants' experiences, while the comparison of respondents allowed me to draw broad conclusions about teachers and their exit motives.

I drew my sample from a variety of organizational contexts to gain insight into the attrition problem in social justice-oriented urban charter and traditional public schools. Interviews provided data. My interviews were in-depth and semi-structured, with the majority of questions open-ended. I gathered information about the teachers' preparation, along with their entry stories, work experiences, and exit stories. My interviews were audio-recorded with permission of the participants and transcribed for analysis.

Entry Motives

Through the analysis of the data, two main entrance constructs emerged: a pro-social-justice mindset and career uncertainty. I discovered that all the participants shared a pronounced

desire to make a difference and give back, and a hope that they could achieve these goals through teaching. Although these teachers knew they wanted to make a positive impact on the world, a majority of participants had no idea what they wanted to do upon graduation. Further, they viewed teaching as not prestigious, but rather a line of work that could be tried for a while with no long-term commitment. Most teachers believed, upon entrance, that it would be hard work, but they were confident that they could do it.

Upon entrance into the program, the participants saw themselves as highly successful. Many came from families who valued education. Almost all were recruited from college environments in which education and prestigious careers were standard. The participants in the study were young, ambitious people who entered the classroom with idealism and excitement. Yet they quickly felt a loss of energy and passion and ended up leaving the classroom relatively soon.

The two main entrance constructs, pro-social mindset and career uncertainty, name the common entrance motives described by the participants. These constructs overlap and interact with one another.

Exit Motives

The exit motives fell into three categories that were connected to the entrance motives: loss of passion or energy, shift in self-concept or self-identity, and loss of social connections. These motives blend and build on one another in the decision to leave the classroom.

In revisiting my early hypothesis that teachers possibly leave owing to career flexibility, reality shock, disillusionment, or burnout, I found the exit motives were most closely aligned with career flexibility and reality shock. Pro-social mindset and career uncertainty guided these young teachers to a temporary commitment to teaching. They chose particularly difficult school contexts in which they worked hard, were confronted with the reality of social disparities, and found that they could not make a positive impact with the skills and energy at their disposal. They left exhausted, though not to the degree of burnout, for work that better suited them.

Many interviewees felt that they had failed at teaching or had gotten to a place where they were doing more of a disservice in the classroom than having a positive influence. Some might have intellectually understood that beginners could not expect to be masters in their first years, yet emotionally it came as a shock that success eluded them. This feeling of failure was demoralizing. Exhaustion and defeat kept them from building on small successes, learning the complexities of teaching, and bettering their practice. They saw themselves on a downward spiral, ultimately making the decision to leave.

Initially I hypothesized that movement disillusionment and burnout might be important exit motives as well. The data did not bear this hypothesis out. I believe this is the case because interviewees from beginning to end approached their decisions to enter and exit the classroom with an individualistic mindset. Even though their pro-social orientation could have opened them up to the possibility of teaching as a collective struggle, and organizations such as Teach for America frame their work in terms of a social movement, my data show that decision-making about entering or leaving the classroom was thoroughly based on a personal calculus. What suited these young teachers personally, in the moment, was the main consideration. Under these circumstances it is not surprising that burnout, as defined in the literature, was rather rare among interviewees. The narratives are full of references to being exhausted. But there is very little indication that once the decision was made to leave this exhaustion left much residue. Before

deeper burnout could occur, these young teachers moved on and dedicated themselves to other pursuits that suited them better.

Implications for Practice

This study highlights some areas where greater attention to recruiting, preparation, and structure of the work could make a difference.

The data suggest we are recruiting the wrong people. If we want teachers to commit to the time and work needed to become good teachers and overcome the challenges of the first three years of teaching, we need to seek out and recruit individuals who are pro-socially minded, ambitious, hard-working, and highly committed to the profession. The participants in this study were idealistic, pro-socially minded people who were uncertain of a career path and only thought of teaching as a possibility if it suited them. But teaching is too difficult to master in three years and the participants, who were used to succeeding and overcome challenges, faced a harsh reality of needing far more preparation and skill to become successful at this profession. Inevitably the participants did not have the level of commitment and understanding to sustain their novice years in the classroom. They left the classroom because the reality was too difficult, their commitment was for the short term, and they expected to make little sacrifice upon entering.

We need to recruit teachers who want to be in the classroom and who see teaching as their chosen profession. Teaching requires comprehensive preparation and development. Teaching is not something that is easily mastered as many of the participants in the study believed. The participants felt they had failed because it did not come easily to them. The clamor for more professional development was absent from the interviews. If they had understood teaching as a profession and had seen it more as a long journey rather than a short, steep achievement to launch them to their real career, they might have been less weathered by the beginning-teacher challenges and been able to see a longer road to achievement. This longer road requires professional development and practice, which the participants did not expect. Individuals who view teaching as a profession are fueled by the investment in time and energy that builds skills and knowledge in teaching. These teachers will endure the reality shock through longer and more comprehensive preparation and understanding that it takes many years to be successful.

Our nation cannot rely on these temporary teachers if we want stability and growth in our schools. We need to recruit those who want to teach as a career. We need teachers who want to become masters of the classroom culturally, instructionally, and technically. These teachers will still face exhaustion because of the demands of the job. Teaching can be rewarding, yet the current accountability structures identify only test scores as measures of success. Teachers will be rewarded by feelings of self-respect, self-accomplishment, and personal growth. School leaders must support teachers throughout their teaching career and establish new success measures that fuel the motivation of their teachers. We need to provide teachers with beginning teacher support and then continue the support as they grow more experienced. Development opportunities for more experienced teachers are lacking in many of our schools, especially those that are particularly high-need. Teachers who see themselves in the classroom for a longer period of time are more likely to see their shortcomings in the classroom as informative feedback to further improve their practice, and this desire to develop in the profession must be met. School leaders and school systems must make teaching a respected career option by continuously training, developing, and supporting their teachers.

Teaching students in disadvantaged social contexts is highly complex and difficult. Teaching is a profession that deserves the best of the best for our nation's children. Pro-socially minded, ambitious, and hard-working people are a strong asset to our nation's schools; however, commitment to the profession of teaching is essential.

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Appendix 1: Participant Summary Chart

	Name (pseudo)	Pathway into teaching	Type of placement	Length of teaching (yrs)	Current position
1	Olivia Kyle	<i>Alternative</i>	Charter	3	EdTech
2	Cate Nathan	Traditional	Charter	9	School Administrator – Charter
3	Sam Henson	TFA	Charter	2	Corporate
4	Carson Remming	Traditional	Charter	3	Teaching – Traditional Public
5	Steve Heng	TFA	Charter	2	Corporate
6	Eileen Gally	TFA	Charter	8	Instructional Coach – Charter
7	Patricia Kelly	TFA	Charter	3	Social Worker – Charter
8	Elizabeth Jones	<i>Alternative</i>	Charter	4	Instructional Coach – Charter
9	Hannah Erickson	TFA	Charter	5	Teaching – Traditional Public
10	Chun Hoe	Traditional	Charter	9	Teaching – Independent School
11	Alyson Bailey	TFA	Traditional Public	3	EdTech
12	Brandy Neimer	TFA	Traditional Public	3	Teaching – Traditional Public
13	Brandon Emerson	TFA	Traditional Public	3	EdTech
14	Sara Boyarin	TFA	Traditional Public	2	Unemployed
15	Zella Little	TFA	Traditional Public	2	Instructional Coach – Traditional Public
16	Rachel Stevens	TFA	Traditional Public	3	Education Nonprofit
17	Brooke Radner	TFA	Charter	4	Graduate School
18	Whitney Johnson	TFA	Charter	1.5	For Profit start-up
19	Isabella Stook	TFA	Traditional Public	7	Education Nonprofit
20	Scott Chase	TFA	Traditional Public	2	Corporate
21	Amanda Aronson	TFA	Traditional Public	2	Education Nonprofit
22	Danie Edwards	TFA	Traditional Public	2	Graduate School
23	Sophia Kalkins	TFA	Traditional Public	2	Graduate School
24	Brett James	Traditional	Charter	2	Teaching – Traditional Public
25	Victor Kheils	TFA	Charter	3	Nonprofit
26	Trent Sorenson	<i>Alternative</i>	Charter	8	School Administrator – Charter
27	Yvonne Adams	TFA	Charter	6	Instructional Coach – Charter
28	Kevin Dune	TFA	Charter	2	School Administrator – Traditional Public
29	Callie Ravens	<i>Alternative</i>	Charter	3	Instructional Coach – Charter
30	Winslow Emory	TFA	Charter	7	Instructional Coach – Charter

Appendix 2: Emails

Email A: Human Resources Department email sent out

Hello.

My name is Catherine Arenson and I am a graduate student at the University of California, Berkeley in the Graduate School of Education. I am currently working on my dissertation study to better understand the rapid turnover in our schools. I want to explore teachers' decision making that lead up the decision to leave.

I asked the human resources department to pass along this email to teachers who have left the organization. In honoring your privacy, I was not given your contact information.

Would you be willing to sit down with me for an interview? The interview would be at most an hour. I would come to wherever is most convenient for you.

If you agree, please email me back with your contact information at the email address below. Or reply to the human resource officer that sent you this email and allow them to release your contact information to me so that I can contact you with further details.

Everything would be confidential. This study is for my dissertation and I will certainly share my dissertation with you if you would like.

I hope I will get the chance to connect with you.

Thank you for your time.

Catherine Arenson
carenson@yahoo.com
(415) 235-5772

Email B: Teacher recommended by another teacher or principal

Hi_____.

My name is Catherine Arenson and I am a graduate student at the University of California, Berkeley in the Graduate School of Education. I got your name from _____.

I am currently in a doctoral program working on my dissertation study to better understand the rapid turnover in our schools. I want to explore teachers' decision making that lead up the decision to leave.

If you agree, I would like to interview you. The interview would be at most an hour and I would come to wherever is most convenient for you.

If you don't mind being interviewed, just email me back with any possible times and locations.

I really appreciate your time and hope that we can connect soon.

Everything would be confidential. This study is for my dissertation and I will certainly share my dissertation with you if you would like.

Thank you for your time.

Catherine Arenson
carenson@yahoo.com
(415) 235-5772

Appendix 3: Interview Questions

PHASES	Questions	Probing Questions	Root of Questions
Big Idea	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. When you were in college (or maybe before) what did you imagine your life to be like? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. What were your hopes and dreams? 2. What were you most passionate about when you first graduated from college? 3. What excited you in terms of work opportunities? 4. Were you inspired by certain ideals or dreams? 5. Describe your ideal job or career? 6. Who was most influential? 7. How have your passions or pursuits changed over your working years? 8. Where do you see yourself in five years? Ten years? 9. How would you describe yourself? Do you see yourself more as an Idealist? Or pragmatist? 		<p>Career Flexibility/Launching Movement Idealism</p> <p>To establish if teacher felt part of a movement or calling to teaching. What were their career aspirations?</p>
Phase 1: Entry	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How did you come into teaching? What lead you to pursue teaching? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Traditional preparatory program? Teach For America? Oakland Teaching Fellows? Other? b. Did you prepare for a career in teaching? 2. Where did you start your teaching career? 3. How did you choose this (first school) 4. Where did you work/What did you do you got this teaching job? 5. How would you describe your motivation to go into teaching? 6. Did teaching serve any of your hopes or dreams? Why or why not? 7. What was/is the purpose of teaching for you? <p>If Teach For America Program? _____ Teach Fellows? Other similar?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Describe your feelings about your experience with TFA? - What was TFA like for you? - What was your relationship like with the other corps members? - Did you feel a close bond with other corps members? - Did you feel bonded by certain goals? How? - What were those goals? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did you imagine your job as a teacher? • If you planned to leave after a short time, did you know what you wanted to do next? • Did you always plan to _____ after a few years of teaching? • How committed were you to the TFA mission, etc? • When you came into teaching, tell me how that all unfolded.... • Did you prepare for a career in teaching? • Did you consider your teaching job temporary when you began? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. If so, why did you choose to teach first? • What did you do afterwards? 	<p>Career Flexibility/Launching Movement Idealism</p> <p>To establish if teacher felt part of a movement or calling to teaching. What were their career aspirations?</p> <p>Why did they go into teaching?</p> <p>Did teacher join a movement or a mission? Did teacher solely want to launch their “other career”? Did teacher believe they would have a career in teaching?</p>

	<p>8. Were you inspired by the organization or others around you? How?</p> <p>9. How did you come to decide to teach at this particular school? Or charter school organization?</p> <p>10. What did you know about this school? Or charter school organization?</p> <p>11. What were some expectations you held for teaching before you took it?</p> <p>12. Did you know anyone who already taught at this school?</p>		
Phase 2: First Year	<p>1. What did you teach and for how long?</p> <p>2. What was teaching like at this school?</p> <p>3. What were some highs and lows of the work?</p> <p>4. What are some vivid memories you have of teaching at this school?</p> <p>5. Can you describe what it is like to be a teacher at your school?</p> <p>6. How was your relationship with other colleagues?</p> <p>7. What was your relationship like with your school leader?</p> <p>8. What were the working conditions like at this school?</p> <p>9. Did you have any expectations met? Or did anything surprise you about the work?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did you feel committed to the work before entering the field? • How did your perspective of teaching for a career change through your teaching experience? • What descriptors would you use to describe your change in perspective/ attitude towards teaching as a career? • What were your expectations of this job? • How did your expectations change? • What was it like when you first encountered 'real' kids? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. You chose quite difficult circumstances 	<p>Reality Shock Career Flexibility/Launching Movement Idealism</p> <p>What did the teacher experience in their first year of teaching?</p> <p>How did they get through their first year?</p> <p>Did it math their expectations going in? Did it change their attitude, motivation, beliefs in the profession or the movement?</p>
Phase 3: Mid-Year		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would you describe your motivation to go into teaching? • Were you able to make a difference as a teacher? • How would you describe your commitment to social justice? • When you think of your teaching experience, what were your goals? Tell me more... and how does that affect you now? • Did you experience change your perspective on teaching? • How has teaching affected your mission in life? • Do you have the same goals now? How do you see pursuing those goals? • What does social justice mean to you? Does this mission factor into your decision to teach or stay teaching? 	<p>Movement Disillusionment/ Fulfillment - Career Flexibility/Launching - Reality Shock - Burnout</p> <p>Was their choice to work and their perspective on their work driven by their idealism and the movement?</p>

Phase 4: Exit	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Why did you decide to leave teaching? 2. What lead you to this decision? 3. Do you feel your teaching experience influenced your decision to leave? Why or why not? How? 4. What were major factors that contributed to your decision to leave? Can you describe them for me? 5. Was there a specific moment that you remember in which you made the decision to leave? 6. What did it feel like to make that decision? 7. How did you feel about the decision once it was made? 8. What would have made you stay in teaching? To keep you at your school? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What were your relationships like with your students and co-workers? • How did these relationships develop? • Did these relationships change? • Tell me about what motivated you to keep on working even when it was so hard? • What do you remember being proud of in this last year? How do you think your co-workers would describe you in that last year? • Do you hold any other roles/ leadership positions at this time? How could things have been different to make you continue at your school? 	<p>Movement Disillusionment/ Fulfillment Career Flexibility/Launching Reality Shock Burnout</p> <p>When did they make the decision to leave? What factors contributed to their decision to leave? Did something trigger their decision to leave? What were they feeling during this decision process? What did they do next? Did they experience the beginnings of burnout?</p>
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