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Courses of Action

A Qualitative Investigation Into Urban Teacher Retention and Career Development

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This article reports on a study investigating relationships among the reasons for entry, preparation experiences, workplace conditions, and future career plans of 15 early-career teachers working in urban Los Angeles. Specifically, the authors examine why these teachers stay in, shift from, or consider leaving the urban schools in which they teach. Our analysis highlights the need to reconceptualize teacher retention to acknowledge and support the development of deep, varied, successful careers in urban education. Findings demonstrate that these urban teachers will remain in urban education if they can adopt multiple education roles inside and outside the classroom and receive professional support during the whole of their careers, not just the beginnings of their teaching.

Keywords: *urban education; teacher retention; teacher development; teacher education; teaching careers*

Teachers in the United States: Is There a Shortage?

Schools' highly publicized inability to successfully staff all public school classrooms with qualified teachers has captured the nation's attention (National Commission on Teaching for America's Future, 2003).[1] According to recent reports, remedying this staffing crisis will require hiring more than two million new teachers during the next 10 years (Hussar, 1999). Although often termed a *teacher shortage* and overwhelmingly attributed to simultaneous increases in retirement and student enrollments, schools' staffing crisis actually results in large part from teacher turnover—the rate at which teachers migrate from one school to another ("movers") or leave teaching altogether ("leavers") (Ingersoll, 2002, 2003). For many of those termed

leavers, teaching is a short-term endeavor. Nearly 20% of new teachers abandon the profession within 3 years of having entered, whereas as many as 46% leave within their first 5 years on the job (Henke, Chen, & Geis, 2000; Ingersoll, 2003).

Despite such seemingly staggering levels of early career attrition, teachers' migration from school to school accounts for a near equal portion of overall teacher turnover. In addition to the 290,000 teachers who left the profession in 1999, 250,000 moved from one school to another following a general migration pattern toward more affluent schools and districts (Ingersoll, 2003). Together, this amounts to more than half a million jobs in flux annually, an enormous financial and organizational burden for schools to bear. It is not a surprise that of all public schools, those located in urban, low-income communities face the most extreme turnover rates and suffer the most acute staffing problems (Carroll, Reichardt, Guarino, & Mejia, 2000; Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2001, 2004; Ingersoll, 2004; Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002; National Commission on Teaching for America's Future, 2003). On the whole, teachers in high-poverty urban schools are as much as 50% more likely to migrate or leave than those in low-poverty schools (Ingersoll, 2003). In response to losing disproportionate numbers of teachers each year, high-poverty schools often fill resulting vacancies with underqualified teachers who are not only less prepared to teach but also migrate and leave schools at higher rates than their certified peers (Darling-Hammond, 2000).

In light of such inequity, the following questions, which compose the guiding frame for this article and for the study on which it is based, deserve sustained attention. Who enters the teaching profession? Where, why, and for how long? What compels teachers to stay or leave a particular school, or more broadly, to stay or leave teaching altogether? And under what circumstances do highly qualified teachers choose to stay in schools that need them most? This article explores these questions in the context of early career development among specially trained graduates of a teacher education program that is explicitly committed to preparing teachers for urban, high-priority placements.

Teacher Education at UCLA: Center X

Created in 1994, Center X is a 2-year urban teacher preparation master's program and a set of statewide professional development efforts for teachers (Anderson & Olsen, 2006; Miner, 2006; Oakes, 1996; Olsen et al.,

2005).[2] The mission of this teacher education program is to prepare teachers for successful work as social justice educators in urban communities. The curriculum stresses views of inequity as structural, activism as necessary, multiculturalism as central, and the critical study of race and culture as crucial. The program rejects purely technical, social efficiency models of teaching and learning in favor of culturally relevant pedagogy, sociocultural learning approaches, and moral-political dimensions of teaching. Teacher candidates are put into small learning teams in which they meet regularly for 2 years. Throughout the program, students are exposed to sociocultural learning theory (e.g., Cummins, 1996, 2000; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Moll, 1988; Vygotsky, 1978), multiculturalism and identity (e.g., Banks, 1994; Darder, 1998; Tatum, 1997), culturally responsive teaching (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 1999; Oakes & Lipton, 2003), critical pedagogy (e.g., Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1992; hooks, 1994; McLaren, 1997), and teacher inquiry (e.g., Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, 2001).

Students participate in Center X seminars and student-teach during their novice year, and then during their second resident year, they work full-time as Los Angeles teachers while meeting weekly with their 1st-year program colleagues. Center X partners exclusively with schools in high-poverty neighborhoods—those urban communities most in need of committed, highly qualified teachers. All incoming Center X students matriculate with the understanding that both teaching years exist within this network of high-priority, urban partnership schools.[3] Although Center X remains a work in progress, it is a good context for study, given that it offers a specialized, intensive, urban teacher preparation experience.

Investigating the Career Development of Center X Graduates

The study on which this article reports is part of a larger research project investigating the preparation, development, and retention of Center X teachers (Quartz & The Teacher Education Program Research Group, 2003; Quartz, Thomas, et al., in press). This larger project has been collecting longitudinal survey data on approximately 1,000 program graduates and using statistical analyses to better understand their retention rates and career pathways. As a subset of that larger project, this study is a qualitative investigation into the interdependencies among reasons for entry, preparation experiences, workplace conditions, professional development opportunities, and future career plans of a handful of Center X graduates working in

Table 1
Demographic Breakdown of the 15 Informants

Teacher[a]	Gender	Race or Ethnicity	Years Teaching
Jasmine	Female	Filipino, Pilipino	2
Karina	Female	Chinese, Chinese American	2
Mei	Female	Other	2
Mike	Male	Chinese, Chinese American	2
Anthony	Male	Filipino, Pilipino	3
Maeve	Female	White, Caucasian	3
Michelle	Female	Chicano, Mexican American	3
Allison	Female	Other	4
Jiao	Male	Chinese, Chinese American	4
Kyuhei	Male	Japanese, Japanese American	4
Leah	Female	White, Caucasian	4
Catalina	Female	Latino, Latin American	5
Christina	Female	Other	5
Elizabeth	Female	Latino, Latin American	5
Natalia	Female	Chicano, Mexican American	6

a. All names are pseudonyms of the individual teachers' choosing.

urban Los Angeles elementary schools.[4] More specifically, this study examines why these early career teachers stay in or consider leaving the urban schools where they currently teach.

To conduct this investigation, we purposefully selected four urban elementary schools with which Center X partners, choosing one school in each of four Los Angeles Unified School District subdistricts. We then used stratified random selection to choose four early career teachers from each school, seeking a sample that would reflect the larger Center X population in gender, race and ethnicity, self-reported degree of satisfaction with preparation experience, and self-reported commitment to future teaching.[5] Hindered by population constraints, the sample consists of 15 (not 16) teachers; however, their reported satisfaction with their preparation program and their reported commitment to teaching are more or less evenly distributed in the sample, and their gender and race and ethnicity distributions approximately reflect the overall Center X graduate population. See Table 1 (Demographic Breakdown of the 15 Informants) for this and other demographic information.

The research design included three 2-hour, semistructured, audiotaped interviews conducted with each teacher during the 2003 to 2004 academic year—one in fall, one in winter, and one in spring. In addition, 90-minute classroom observations accompanied the second round of interviews. For

analysis, data were coded, portraits of the teachers and their schools were created, and various analytical relationships among and across codes, teachers, schools, and themes were explored (Becker, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1984). This article examines the perspectives and meaning-systems the teachers expressed and introduces those themes that appear to have structured their evolving career plans.[6] Given the nature of the analysis, we drew primarily from interview data; however, observation data were used as a secondary and corroborating (or complicating or disconfirming) source when appropriate.[7] From a methodological standpoint, classroom observations also enabled deeper and more robust interviewing: The observation experience built additional trust between interviewer and interviewee and offered concrete material for the subsequent (and directly following) interviews. In this way, secondary data collection (classroom observation) enhanced the quality of our primary data source (in-depth interviews).

Career Paths and Professional Perspectives

The 15 urban elementary teachers reported a range of future plans. At first glance, the teachers seemed to articulate as many ideas about their futures as there were sample members, but on closer inspection, patterns emerged. We found that all teachers could be placed into one of three categories according to current or future career status: *stayers* (who planned to continue teaching indefinitely), *uncertains* (who either could not speculate about their future or intended to teach a while longer and then leave teaching), and *leavers* (who were leaving classroom teaching but staying in education). Table 2 (Career Status of Participating Teachers) presents the teachers according to these categories.

One point of emphasis concerning our category names is that those teachers in the right-hand column titled *leavers* were leaving classroom teaching but were not in fact leaving the field of education. This detail is significant, because many studies on teacher retention do not or cannot (because of data constraints) make this distinction (e.g., Ingersoll, 2002, 2003). Therefore in most analyses, our three leavers (20% of our sample) would be counted as attrition. Although that is technically true, it ignores the fact that these teachers have not left the profession per se (and as we explain later, have not abandoned their initial reasons for entry) but were moving into other dimensions of urban education work. Every leaver in our sample reported still being strongly committed to urban education and to the goals that first brought them into urban teaching, but each was electing

Table 2
Current Career Status of Participating Teachers (*N* = 15)

	Stayers (*n* = 6)	Uncertains (*n* = 6)	Leavers (aka Shifters) (*n* = 3)
2 years teaching	Jasmine Mei	Karina Mike	
3 years teaching	Anthony Maeve	Michelle	
4 years teaching	Leah	Kyuhei Allison	Jaio
5 years teaching	Elizabeth	Christina	Catalina
6 years teaching			Natalia

Note: All teacher names are pseudonyms. Self-reports here may be a bit misleading, as choosing to say that one is going to stay in teaching as long as possible might be a dispreferred move given that informants know they are talking to ex-teachers now-academics conducting research. Consider Goffman's (1959) "impression management."

to pursue personal-professional goals through other kinds of education work. This held true for many of the uncertains as well. We might, therefore, term these teachers *shifters* rather than *leavers*, for they were shifting or planning to shift the kind of work they were doing within urban education. We revisit this point throughout the article.

The Three Categories of Career Status

To delve inside the cursory numbers and career categories, we focused our analysis on the 15 teachers themselves. Taken individually, each teacher's story puts a human face on teacher retention and teacher development research, and taken as a whole, the stories provide a rich cross-case analysis of influences on career decisions around urban teaching. In this section, we introduce some of the teachers' stories while discussing the three career categories. In the subsequent section, we explore themes across the whole sample.

Stayers (6 of 15)

There are some caveats to the stayers' plans to continue teaching indefinitely. We found that choosing to stay in teaching was not about simply remaining behind the closed door of one's classroom until retirement. The

stayers reported complex and varied plans for their teaching futures, and most expected their roles and responsibilities to change and grow with time. Two reported a desire to earn a PhD without leaving teaching. Two others reported an interest in pursuing certification from the National Board for Professional Teacher Standards. Another said she might leave teaching for a few years to have kids of her own. An interesting finding was that not all stayers intended to remain in their current schools: One was moving at the end of the year to an out-of-state urban school, because family illness and caregiving responsibilities required that she leave California. Two other stayers were considering the possibility of leaving their respective schools at some point in the future, one because of the administration and the other because of the parents in the community.

Leah. As an undergraduate music major from the Midwest, Leah had initially planned to become a music teacher until she began tutoring students of color and English Language Learners. After 5 years as an early elementary teacher, Leah reported plans to remain teaching indefinitely at the school where she had worked since first entering the classroom. Asked why, she answered, “Because I’ve invested so much, and I love the community and I love the families. I wouldn’t leave.” Leah valued what she considered to be a supportive administration and school culture. She loved being able to team-teach with a good friend and fellow Center X graduate. The two spent a few hours each week planning together. Leah was also connected to a larger network of coworkers without whom, she said, “I wouldn’t have survived the first few years. I probably would have left the profession.” She met regularly with 10 teachers as part of an inquiry group and more often (for example, Sunday brunch every few weeks) with a smaller group whom she counted among her closest friends. Although happy with her career choice, Leah still found teaching challenging and mentioned connections with her peers as a major source of strength and inspiration: “You can’t just be an island . . . it’s too emotionally exhausting.”

The principal at Leah’s school actively supported group and individual efforts to “improve the culture of the school.” With other members of the inquiry group, Leah had planned and hosted schoolwide family nights. She had also applied for and received a grant to create a school garden, which now contained classroom plots where teachers and students could learn by doing their own gardening. When she talked about her professional future, Leah reported plans to earn National Board Certification and often mentioned a desire to take on additional roles, perhaps working with parents and the community.

Anthony. Anthony was one of a few sample members who expressed an interest in pursuing doctoral work in education while remaining in the classroom. As an undergraduate biochemistry and sociology double major, Anthony had planned to enter the medical profession but decided—against his family's wishes—to shift his career path and make teaching his "vehicle for change." He was now finishing his 4th year as a fifth-grade teacher and fulfilling a number of leadership and activist roles in his school and the community. Despite his school's need for hard-working, qualified, and committed educators, workplace conditions were not encouraging new teachers' long-term employment there: Anthony often spoke about an administration that was at best unsupportive and at worst actively working against the needs of teachers, parents, and students. Having concluded that "real change happens systemically," Anthony had made a conscious effort to widen his sphere of influence, in particular, organizing fellow teachers around schoolwide issues.

When asked about his future, Anthony offered a number of interests, including moving to another school if the administrative culture at his own did not improve or working with like-minded friends and educators to open a teacher-led public school. Eventually, Anthony said he planned to enroll in a doctoral program but wanted to find a way to do so while still remaining connected to the community where he worked and continuing to self-identify as a teacher first and foremost. No matter what career paths he pursued, he believed that being a teacher would remain central to accomplishing the kind of impact and educational change he was seeking. That said, he felt that a PhD would carry a degree of authority and, in anticipation of taking on more decision-making roles, said, "I want a way to back myself up." The impulse to pursue an avenue that would seemingly confer more power and backup is perhaps not surprising, given Anthony's experience at a school where he felt unsupported and disrespected. At one point, as an aside, Anthony also explained his interest in earning a doctorate as "the logical [next] step," a phrase that was echoed by others in our sample and that merits scrutiny around what particular logic he and others were relying on as they considered their careers.

Anthony's and Leah's stories begin to reveal the web of influences shaping individual teachers' career decisions. Their comments about unsupportive and supportive administration, respectively, connect to other studies showing how the presence or absence of strong administrative support influences teachers' career decisions (Ingersoll, 2003; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Shen, 1997). Both teachers' interest in schoolwide change indicated a desire to extend their reach beyond their own classrooms and to influence

decisions that affect the broader school community—decisions that are often made for (rather than by) teachers (Ingersoll, 2003; Ingersoll & Alsalam, 1997; Weiss, 1999). As Leah, a committed stayer, explained her work, “It’s so much bigger than just being a good teacher.”

Uncertains (6 of 15)

There are three subcategories that compose this category. One contains two teachers who reported that they might eventually pursue careers in administration. Another contains two teachers who said they would leave the classroom soon to have families: Because they found teaching so time consuming, they believed it was impossible to be an excellent teacher and an excellent parent simultaneously. The last subcategory contains two teachers whose uncertainty left them reluctant to speculate on their futures, though when pressed, they reported they would probably not stay in classroom teaching forever.

Allison. Allison is one of two in our sample who loved teaching but believed she would leave teaching soon to have children of her own. After college, while working in a law firm, she realized that her favorite part of the day was when her boss’s kids showed up and she would help them with homework. It occurred to her that she would rather be on a playground with kids than in an office with adults. After 2 years in a second-grade classroom teaching on an emergency credential (her Spanish fluency was needed), she entered Center X. At the time of our study, Allison was in her 4th year teaching at the same school where she student taught and was content in her job: It offered her collegial support and tremendous learning opportunities; the school (a different school than Anthony’s or Leah’s) was well organized to promote productive relationships between teachers and students; she loved the kids, enjoyed team-teaching with other teachers, and considered her principal a like-minded leader who shared her education philosophy and supported her growth. Yet she believed that teaching was so labor intensive and time consuming (she reported working 10 hours a day, 6 days a week, and said that professional development, although valuable, took up 2 weeks of her off-track vacation time) that she would not be able to keep the same pace when she started her own family: “This is my 6th year teaching, and I’m still staying here until 6 o’clock at night, and that can’t last if I have kids.” She was not sure whether it would be fair to share a contract with another teacher—essentially teaching half-time—because she worried that would compromise the students’ experience. She therefore reported that once she worked off her school loans, she would either leave teaching while

she spent some years raising her kids or she would shift into more flexible and less taxing work as a speech pathologist. Either way, she did not intend to exit urban education permanently. She explained,

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

Allison's story raises several issues. One is that she found teaching a satisfying career but—and we heard this from many—did not think she could keep up the intense work pace much longer. In these teachers' opinions, successful teaching in these schools required an enormous commitment; this kind of commitment may be something that idealistic, dedicated urban teachers will only be willing or able to supply for a limited time. This notion is supported by research on teachers who burn out—not because they fail to achieve success in their workplace or dislike the work of teaching but because they cannot keep up the intense pace and overwork, which is sometimes compounded by school principals' tendency to heap additional duties on new, energetic teachers (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). Also, notice Allison's difficulty in viewing teaching as anything less than full dedication: For her (and others in the sample), teaching—particularly in high-priority urban schools—is conceptualized as an all-or-nothing proposition. None of the teachers in our sample could conceive of being a successful urban teacher without an extraordinary—perhaps unsustainable—commitment to the work. Another issue is Allison's intention to stay in teaching until she has worked off her loans, forgiveness of which was tied to a 5-year teaching commitment in hard-to-staff California schools.[8] This raises the question of whether she would have already had left teaching without this financial incentive.

Leavers, aka Shifters (3 of 15)

One fifth of our sample had made a decision to shift into new roles in urban education. Two teachers were entering doctoral programs, and one—who had previously earned an administrative master's degree at UCLA—was becoming an administrator. We found three commonalties among these teachers. First, they were all on the veteran end of our sample (one in the 4th year of teaching, one in the 5th, one in the 6th). This suggests that their decisions are not idiosyncratic but may be linked to having had a few years

of urban teaching experience "under their belt." (The rest of our sample is more or less evenly distributed across the spectrum of years teaching). The idea that career development does in fact have a developmental dimension appeared across the data: Although all 15 of the teachers in our sample reported that they valued—to varying degrees and with caveats—their Center X experience, most also reported feeling overwhelmed and unprepared during their 1st year in the classroom and then emerging from that "survival phase" (Fuller & Bown, 1975) or "reality shock" (Veenman, 1984) during Years 2 and 3 with increased confidence and classroom control. Accompanying those developmental changes, shifting teachers also reported emerging desires to "widen [their] sphere of influence," "pursue the next thing," and/or consider a departure from teaching.

Second, these three shifters were at the far end of the continuum in terms of taking on multiple roles. In other words, they had in the past, and/or were currently, engaged in many education roles aside from their teaching assignments (or their "primary roles"). This pattern confirms a trend already identified in the larger population of Center X graduates: Those who report they will stay in teaching until retirement tend to take on fewer roles than those who report plans to leave teaching soon (Goode, Quartz, Barraza-Lyons, & Thomas, 2003). At first, we speculated that this might mean that teachers who are interested in more than "just teaching," as evidenced by seeking out multiple roles, eventually feel compelled to leave teaching for other education work. But our data do not bear this out. Instead, our data suggest that some teachers, having already decided to leave the classroom, prepare for their next career phase by seeking out nonteaching or leadership experiences; for example, two shifters in our sample reported having taken on additional roles to strengthen their graduate school applications.

And third, the three shifters also shared a common desire to return to UCLA for graduate studies. All three had applied to UCLA programs (although not all had been accepted). Perhaps this willingness to rematriculate at their graduate—and in some cases also their undergraduate—university was partly because of a degree of assumed familiarity and comfort. Or perhaps this highlights one of the potential unintended outcomes of participation in a university-affiliated teacher education program: During the preservice experience, the curtain is drawn back to reveal for teacher candidates the wide range of postgraduate career paths available in urban education.

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

> When I was a little girl I remember going to school, waking up in the morning and forcefully trying to make myself sick so I wouldn't have to go to school. I remember being bullied and not being treated fairly [because] I was Latina [and] spoke Spanish and was always unhappy. School was always a place I didn't want to be. As I progressed to high school, it was the same thing.

Catalina reported that she had long wanted to be a teacher for Latino students like herself. In college, she was further motivated by seeing so few Latinos at the university: "I remember going to college and looking at the percentages of Latino people in college, and I thought the numbers were really low—just a horrible percentage for the percentage of people that live in California . . . [I entered teaching because] I wanted those percentages to change." After 5 years teaching in the school where she student-taught, Catalina had applied for and was accepted into two local EdD programs; she planned to leave the classroom for graduate school starting the following fall. Catalina viewed working in education at the university level (as a teacher educator, or conducting minority outreach, or maybe doing research—she was not sure) as a way to further realize her initial goal of helping more Latinos into college.

Interestingly, her prior and present experiences with Center X seemed partly to have encouraged this career path. Because she attended a preparation program that stresses personal relationships among teacher candidates and teacher educators, and because Center X offers continued support and connections to its graduates, Catalina had participated in many relationships and activities that had exposed her to dimensions of urban education other than K-12 teaching. Two years ago she was invited to coteach a course for teacher candidates at Center X; she had served as a guiding teacher for student teachers from Center X for several years; and she had taken on various schoolwide and districtwide leadership roles, some of which she was connected to through past and/or current Center X faculty. Talking about her future plans, she named one of her professors (who remains a professional friend) and said, "I want to be just like [her]." (It may not be coincidental that this professor does just what Catalina expressed wanting to do: work as a teacher educator, conduct minority outreach, and do some research.) There is a sense then—and we return to this later—that Center X (consciously or not) may facilitate the shifting of some classroom teachers into other roles within urban education both because it exposes its graduates to other professional realms and because it offers concrete models (in the form of caring faculty, most of whom are ex-teachers themselves and remain connected to graduates) of what shifting can include and how it can be accomplished.

Jiao. Jiao's story offers a second example of a teacher shifting roles within urban education with the expectation of working in urban education for the rest of his life. He traced his interest in education back to his early experiences in school, specifically the difference between an "oppressive" third grade teacher who "who never validated my culture" and prevented Jiao and his classmates from speaking in Chinese and an inspirational fourth grade teacher who "changed my life . . . mended those wounds." Despite the fact that his parents encouraged him to pursue "more prestigious jobs" and "more money," Jiao knew from early on that he wanted to work in education, sought out education-related opportunities such as tutoring when he was an undergraduate, and remained focused on his goal: "I don't want kids to experience what I experienced [with my third-grade teacher], I want to give them that other side that I experienced [with my fourth-grade teacher]." Although he valued teaching and reflected on the importance of good teachers in his own biography, Jiao reported always having viewed teaching as a "stepping stone . . . even during [my teacher preparation] it was like, 'I'm going to teach for a few years and then I'll come out and get my doctorate and do something else.'" Consistent with that plan, he applied to and was accepted in an EdD program, which he planned to enter the following fall while still teaching. Jiao admired his school's principal—a person with whom he reported having a close, supportive relationship—but did not wish to become an administrator himself. Instead, he believed that a district position working within curriculum and instruction—and perhaps eventually a position as an education and curriculum consultant—would best position him to support urban teachers and students "at a macro level."

Although Jiao reported that he would have taken this path regardless, there were several aspects of teaching with which he expressed frustration. He described the profession as "stagnant" concerning salary and status: "In the business world, you can always become an 'associate-' this and then you can become 'vice-' this and then 'director.' In teaching, you're just a teacher." He also lamented the constant pressure of high-stakes testing: Although he felt valued as a successful teacher within his school community, he said that he could not help internalizing a sense of failure when his students did not do well on standardized achievement measures. However, this frustration in the classroom had not prevented Jiao from taking on leadership roles around the school (in fact, it may have encouraged him), including starting and leading a popular teacher inquiry group and an after-school peer tutoring program. Jiao admitted that some of the activities were initiated partly to build his resume for graduate school; nevertheless, they were reported to have become overwhelmingly positive components of the school community.

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

Why Do These Teachers Think About Shifting?

Only 3 of the 15 teachers reported an unequivocal intent to stay in teaching as long as they were able. There were 3 other stayers, but they expressed in interviews (too tentatively, however, for us to categorize them as "uncertains") that they might leave teaching temporarily and/or would not close off the possibility of shifting into other kinds of education work. This means that of 15 teachers, 12 were uncertain about how long they would teach. What can be said about these 12 teachers? First, it seems important to note that all teachers, including these 12, remained committed to their initial reasons for entry, which included the following: to help kids ("I wanted to be with the kids. I want to be in the classroom, I wanted to have a greater impact on their lives."), to be there for kids like themselves ("I remember going to college and looking at the percentages of Latino people [like me] in college, and I thought the numbers were really low, just a horrible percentage for the percentage of people that live within California."), to offer high-quality learning opportunities for low-income children ("At first I cried all the time for these kids and their situations—wanting to be the one to fix it, and realizing that I wasn't going to fix it for them, but I could show them what they could do to fix it and to empower themselves."), to be around children learning ("Working with kids and seeing the light bulbs [go on] . . . the brilliance of kids just in itself, and having a chance to develop this critical consciousness [with them]."), or to change the world ("I think of martyrs who fought in my country, who fought in the name of

social justice . . . [I want to help] underrepresented people succeed in society."). Despite the fact that 12 teachers were shifting or considering shifting into other kinds of education work, they all were doing so within the context of these initial career goals and their assessment of whether these goals could be met while remaining full-time classroom teachers.

We found six strands of reason for leaving or considering leaving the classroom or moving into another education role—in others words, six kinds of reason for shifting. Although several of these reasons emerged as we told individual teachers' stories above, here we examine the following reasons for shifting or leaving across all 12 teachers:

I am stagnating, idling, or plateauing.
I want to make a bigger impact; better achieve my initial goals.
It is time to get my doctorate ("logical step").
Family pressure is an issue.
I love teaching, but . . .

- a) issues related to family—child rearing or caregiving—make teaching difficult.
- b) teaching well is incredibly time consuming.
- c) teaching does not afford me enough money.
- d) I do not love my school, and therefore I'm looking for something else.

These strands are not discrete; all 12 teachers wove two or more of them together to account for their decisions to shift or move or as they articulated their plans for the future.

Several teachers spoke of having "plateaued" and therefore found themselves "stagnating" or "idling." Connected to this is that several teachers had come to believe that their initial reasons for entry could be better met if they shifted into other realms of urban education and that shifting would enable them to effect greater change. For example, Michelle talked about "starting to feel like [my contribution] has to go beyond more than just 20 kids." Jiao talked about feeling the need to "make some type of impact at a macro level." Anthony talked about how "real change happens systemically." Leah talked about the need being "much bigger than just being a good teacher." Allison talked about "going back to [that idea of] social justice, how I can do more than just with my 20 students—where I can go next." And so on. These self-reports around an emerging desire to "do more" connect to literature on teacher career development (e.g., Fessler, 1992; Huberman, 1989, 1993). For example, Huberman (1989, 1993) found a series of interlocking career cycles for teachers in Switzerland; he reported that after 3 to 5 years in teaching, most teachers began to "stabilize" and either became more

activist or innovative in their work or reassessed their career choices. If, as Huberman found, this temporary phase of stabilization with time yields to subsequent experimentation and activism and serenity and relational distance cycles characterized by new levels of professional growth, development, and satisfaction in teaching, one might consider the possibility that some shifters are experiencing genuine impatience but—given time, additional roles, and varied professional development opportunities—would find new challenges and satisfactions without having to leave the classroom. In this case, perhaps early-career teachers would benefit from support regarding how to be professionally patient—how to ward off feelings of stagnating or idling and make use of multiple roles in teaching (for example, the garden project that helped "refresh" and "refocus" Leah) instead of leaving the classroom altogether.

A less linear model such as Fessler's (1992) offers an alternative interpretation. Fessler views career development as fluid, with careers emerging from the dynamic interaction among the individual, the workplace context, and the teaching profession as teachers move in and out of career stages depending on multiple forces in their lives and work. Indeed, various individual, organizational, and professional forces were shaping the decisions of teachers in our sample, as they contemplated career decisions in the context of their own goals, expectations around family and society, features of the schools where they worked, and the opportunities they might find elsewhere in urban education. In this case, the shifting of our sample of teachers may represent the onset of ongoing and perhaps idiosyncratic career movement. This contrasts with the first set of considerations—coming from Huberman's analysis—which assumes a kind of normative career development trajectory for teachers.

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

urban teaching specifically as being short-term and often gendered work. These considerations raise further questions: Does Center X attract or select teacher candidates who are often not satisfied to stay in the classroom? Does Center X socialize its candidates into considering teaching as "a stepping stone" and then facilitate this shifting by offering graduates powerful and varied mentoring experiences and relationships? For some teachers like Jiao, "yes" seems an appropriate response to these questions. For others, the answers are less obvious and more nuanced.

Family pressure is another force at work in the career development of these 15 teachers. Four fifths of the sample reported that their families initially disapproved of their decisions to enter teaching, saying that family members thought teaching did not offer enough status or money. Of those 12 teachers, 7 spoke explicitly about family members having preferred that they pursue careers in medicine, law, or engineering. In almost all cases, teachers reported that, once they were accepted into or graduated from the prestigious master's program at UCLA or became financially independent, parental disapproval eased. Only 3 teachers described their families as unequivocally supporting their decisions to enter teaching: All three were women. Two were the only White teachers in our sample; the third had moved to the United States from Latin America as an adolescent and attributed her family's respect for teaching to the value placed on education in her country of origin. Of the 12 teachers whose families did not support their decision to teach, 4 were male and 8 were female; 7 self-reported as Asian, 3 self-reported as Latino/a, and 2 self-reported as Other. Additionally, 3 of the 4 male teachers drew explicit connections between their families' emerging approval and their plans to pursue what their families viewed as "bigger things": leadership roles beyond the classroom, administrative positions, or further graduate study. One male teacher noted that his father considered teaching largely "a women's role" but supported the idea of the son ultimately becoming a principal or superintendent. Emerging patterns in the data also lead us to wonder about issues of religion, because some families' religious commitments to social service seemed to have provided tacit or explicit encouragement for their children to consider teaching in urban communities. Also visible in the data were issues related to generation and immigration, for example, the possibility that first-generation immigrant parents are less inclined to view teaching as fitting the individual, upward-mobility-based American dreams they may have for their (hard-working, college-educated) children. Interestingly, analysis of data from the larger quantitative investigation into career development among all Center X graduates does indeed suggest a relationship between race and retention in classroom teaching (see Quartz, Thomas et al.,

in press). Although our 15-teacher sample here is too small to afford any conclusiveness, we suspect—on the basis of our findings and those from the larger quantitative analyses—that intertwined cultural values, constructions of gender and family, and societal norms around success often play an important role in how teachers' conceptualize the profession and their own careers.

Nearly all teachers reported "I love teaching, but . . . " That "but" may not be surprising—how many people in any profession would report complete satisfaction?—however, the descriptions that follow the conjunction are worth a look, in part because each was articulated by multiple people. Two teachers said that because teaching was so time intensive and energy draining, they would leave the classroom when they had kids of their own. Several teachers reported that they did not expect to be able to keep up this intense work pace for long, especially because they were no longer young and single. Some also reported that, as teachers, they did not make enough money to pay their bills or buy a house.

Three of the 15 teachers reported that, although they remained committed to teaching, they were not enamored of their school situation and might look for a more amenable school. It is important to note that all three were teaching at the same school and attributed their dissatisfaction largely to the administrative approach to leadership and the resulting school culture. One teacher described the situation, "like walking on eggshells." Another noted, "It's very volatile working here." All three reported distrusting all but a few coworkers who were also good friends. At the same time, these teachers mentioned a general desire for increased autonomy and higher salaries—a reminder of the complex interplay of factors that can potentially drive a teacher from one school to another. Nevertheless, their collective story connects to the larger body of literature documenting links between administrative support and teacher retention; for example, Ingersoll's (2003) finding that poor administrative support accounts for almost half of teacher workplace dissatisfaction.

Somewhat separate from the professional frustrations expressed by teachers were three teachers' comments about "opportunity costs" as partial rationale for their decision to stay in teaching and education. Opportunity costs were not the only reason these teachers reported plans to stay; on the contrary, all three expressed positive feelings about teaching. However, these teachers all acknowledged that they had invested considerable time, money, and lost income to become teachers and that to some degree, in fact, they have "settled" on teaching and would find it difficult to shift or leave teaching and education even if they wanted to.

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

The data suggest that the majority of teachers in our sample remained committed to their initial reasons for becoming urban teachers for social justice and yet were actively considering new ways to meet those professional goals. Just about all the teachers reported, to varying degrees, that their teacher preparation program gave shape and language to their initial reasons for entry, hooked them up with like-minded colleagues, and strengthened their professional commitments. However, most reported that they would not remain in teaching until retirement. We believe the profession needs a frame for careers in urban education that does not automatically bemoan these teachers as “leavers” but rather acknowledges them as “shifters.” Urban education has not necessarily lost them; instead, it appears to be gaining new professionals who will take their initial goals, their preparation, and classroom experience and—with the right kinds of support and continued education—further improve urban teaching, urban education, and urban teacher development in myriad ways, some entirely or partially outside the classroom and some which may ultimately take them out of and then back into the classroom.

For the reasons presented in this article, many of these teachers no longer believe their personal-professional goals are served by working as teachers in urban classrooms, and so they are considering or pursuing other kinds of education work. As already mentioned, Center X appears to have played a role in some of these decisions. Center X exposes students and graduates to multiple aspects of teacher education and urban education work and offers rich opportunities for and examples (e.g., faculty) of what it looks like to shift into graduate school and then university work. As a result, Center X and/or UCLA may be inadvertently grooming graduates for short-term careers as teachers and longer term careers in teacher education, administration, or other kinds of urban education work. This deserves closer consideration both from a programmatic and research perspective; how various pathways into teaching shape teachers’ conceptualizations of their work has implications for the careers that teachers pursue through the long-term.

Our data also show an important trend that runs counter to the prevailing logic about urban, high-priority schools: The majority of the teachers in our study—12 out of 15—like working at the schools where they teach. This is significant, given the increased attention to issues of organizational characteristics in retaining teachers at high-poverty schools (Hanushek et al., 2004; Ingersoll, 2004; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Johnson & The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers, 2004; National Commission on

Teaching for America's Future, 2003). In particular, job dissatisfaction and lack of administrative support are known to be major contributors to teacher turnover (e.g., Ingersoll, 2003; Shen, 1997). What accounts, then, for the positive experience of these 12 teachers, all working in high-priority urban school placements?

According to Moore Johnson and Birkeland (2003), teachers are most likely to report satisfaction when their schools are organized to support them in their efforts to be successful with students. This was the case for the 12 teachers in our study who liked working where they were: All twelve reported mostly positive attributes about their school contexts, including the presence of friends and like-minded peers, opportunities to collaborate and take on multiple roles, and relatively supportive administrations. Despite feeling satisfied overall, however, teachers did report areas where they might like to see improvements. Some areas, such as the desire for better school-site mentorship and more interaction with experienced teachers (who may or may not exist in large numbers given the distribution of teachers across schools), reflect systemic issues;[9] whereas others are more idiosyncratic, as was the case for three teachers—all coworkers at the same school—who described a competitive peer culture in which no one ever admitted to making mistakes and "everyone is trying to outdo everyone else" to appear aligned with the school's philosophy of teaching and learning.

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

between teacher candidates and the schools in which they ultimately choose, and are chosen, to work.

Given a look at these 15 teachers' stories, we see that one emergent challenge is framing and supporting careers in urban education without tacitly relegating the urban teaching profession to a lower rung on the career ladder. For the year following this study, all 15 teachers in our sample planned to continue their work in education, but 3 would leave the classroom and more would likely follow. Although the terms *stayer* and *leaver* may offer an important lens for thinking about teacher retention, they do not do justice to many of the teachers in our sample. We believe that the existence of shifting requires a new career frame that is more inclusive of the multiple professional roles that urban educators adopt "in [their] efforts to further social justice, change the world, and work in communities that are in the most desperate need for highly qualified educators" (Goode et al., 2003, p. 19).

After all, when one considers the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' (2002) estimation that currently employed Americans can expect to change jobs—possibly even careers—five to seven times during the course of their lifetime, it is all the more impressive that these urban educators hope and plan to stay in the field of urban education for the remainder of their professional careers. In today's world, it is rare for any individual to work at the same job for 20 or 30 years, as was the case only a generation ago. This is particularly true for education, a field in which fast-track and short-term teaching may be becoming the norm (Moore Johnson & The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers, 2004). Although the highly trained early career teachers in our sample expressed notable long-term commitments to urban education, our findings illustrate that many felt the need to leave teaching to continue pursuing the goals that brought them into the profession in the first place. Instead of being pulled away or pushed out of classroom teaching, we believe that more teachers will be retained if there are opportunities for them to adopt new roles as career urban educators still connected to classrooms: taking sabbaticals, sharing teaching duties while taking on additional education work, mentoring new teachers in the schools where they teach, working as administrators who teach part-time. The possibilities are numerous.

It is, however, with trepidation that we call for a new and seemingly more differentiated conceptualization of urban careers in education. We understand the adverse effects on schools' organizational health that shifters, regardless of where they go or what kind of educational work they shift into, can have if they leave teaching vacancies in their wake. We also understand that enabling and encouraging shifting carries with it the potential to further degrade the teaching profession and reinforce notions of teaching as a "stepping stone" to more "elite" careers in education (Achinstein, Ogawa, & Speiglman,

2005). Without question, urban schools need excellent teachers, but they also need excellent teacher leaders, school and district leaders, educational researchers, and teacher educators, all of whom must be equipped with the knowledge, skills, and experience necessary to recognize and support successful teaching and learning. We hope this new frame can be constructed in ways that enable these teachers to simultaneously pursue their interests and expand their professional horizons while remaining directly and frequently connected to the students who need them the most.

Notes

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

2. This description of Center X comes from ideas fleshed out in other work. For more discussion of the origins and contours of teacher education at UCLA, see Quartz, Olsen, and Duncan-Andrade, in press; or Olsen et al., 2005.

3. The term *high-priority* is derived from a model-based approach—multiple group latent class cluster analysis—for classifying schools into different priority clusters based on aggregate student measures including the percentage of students enrolled in free or reduced lunch, the percentage of parents without education beyond the high school level, the percentage of students who are English-language learners, and Academic Performance Index. This method offers a more rigorous, empirically-driven means of classifying schools compared to the use of arbitrary cutpoints (Masyn & Quartz, 2004).

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

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

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

7. As an example, when interviewed, four teachers in the same school reported tense relations between administrators on one hand and parents and teachers on the other; our four 90-minute observations—one in each of the four teachers' classrooms—provided corroborating evidence of this tension (e.g., tone and content of administrators' whole-school intercom announcements and quality of interaction between and among teachers, administrators, and parents).

8. California currently has a grant program that loans money to teacher candidates for program tuition and living expenses and then forgives the loan once teachers work for 5 years

in hard-to-staff California schools. Allison said that the grant money is a factor in her decision making but “a consideration . . . not a restriction.”

9. Moore Johnson and Birkeland (2003) describe schools in which veteran teachers work alongside novice teachers in meaningful ways as *integrated professional cultures*—a desirous situation though one which, in urban Los Angeles at least, may be rare given the fact that high-poverty schools such as the four in our sample tend to have more beginning and/or uncertified teachers and fewer qualified and experienced teachers (Carroll, Reichardt, Guarino, & Mejia, 2000; National Commission on Teaching for America’s Future, 2003). For example, at one of the four schools in our sample, more than half of the teachers are in their 1st and 2nd year of teaching, two thirds of the staff have 3 or fewer years teaching experience, and one quarter do not hold full certification.

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