

**On Barren Ground:  
How Urban High Schools Fail to Support and Retain  
Newly Tenured Teachers**

Morgaen L. Donaldson

Project on the Next Generation of Teachers  
Harvard Graduate School of Education

Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association annual conference,  
Montréal, Québec, Canada  
April 15, 2005

## Abstract

*Based on interviews with twelve fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-year teachers who worked in five urban, public high schools, this study examines the career development and retention of newly tenured teachers. Two research questions are addressed: 1) How do twelve fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-year teachers at urban public high schools describe and explain their past, current, and anticipated development within a teaching career? 2) How, if at all, does their career development relate to their decision to stay in or leave teaching? Overall, this study finds that participants' schools failed to support their career development in ways that promoted their long-term retention in teaching. This study reveals four specific findings. First, these newly tenured teachers generally sought to develop a teaching career beyond their classroom. This contrasts with earlier research that found teachers more likely to concentrate, over their career, on deepening practice inside the classroom (McLaughlin & Yee, 1988; Huberman, 1993). Second, this study finds that a distinct sub-group of these teachers entered the classroom intending to teach only short-term, no longer than five years. While this short-term orientation has been documented among new teachers (Peske, Liu, Johnson, Kauffman, & Kardos, 2001), it has not been identified among teachers with tenure. Third, this study finds that the schools in which these "short-termers" worked had enabled them to fulfill their abbreviated commitment to teaching by offering them leadership roles and new opportunities. These people were preparing to leave the profession. Fourth, this study reveals that the remainder of the sample initially planned to teach long-term but, due in part to their schools' lack of support for career development, they had reduced their projected length of stay in teaching.*

## Introduction

Upon receiving tenure, usually after teaching just three years, a teacher has reached the highest formal position her profession has traditionally recognized. When she surveys the remaining thirty or forty years of her career, how does she make sense of the undifferentiated career path before her?

This exploratory study examines how a sample of twelve fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-year teachers in public, urban and semi-urban high schools conceived of their career development. There is scant and limited research on teachers' response to opportunities offered over the teaching career. This research is based on data gathered in the 1970s and 1980s (Fessler & Christensen, 1992; Huberman, 1993; Lortie, 1975; McLaughlin & Yee, 1988; Yee, 1990) and it has not sufficiently considered teachers' perspectives on their own career development. Instead, it has taken an external view, asking how teachers can be developed through, for example, professional development or principal intervention (Guskey & Huberman, 1995; Smylie, 1995). Moreover, research on career development has not been sufficiently fine-grained (see, e.g. Fessler & Christensen, 1992) to capture the views of teachers within a narrow band of experience. Responding to these limitations, this study examines how a sample of current fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-year teachers had developed their teaching careers and the extent to which their schools supported this development.

Although scholars have neglected this population, there is an urgent need to understand how these teachers approach their career development. With the retirement of a large cohort of veterans, today's newly tenured teachers will soon predominate in the workforce. However, they are at high risk of leaving the profession (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). The loss of these teachers, who have more expertise and skill on average than their less-experienced counterparts (Murnane & Phillips, 1981; Rockoff, 2003), may be more damaging to schools than the well-documented attrition of first- or second-year teachers (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Indeed, these "second-stage" teachers have generally surmounted the challenges of classroom management and curricular design experienced by

new teachers (Huberman, 1993). They have refined their teaching methods and grown wiser about how to navigate within their schools. And, unlike their novice counterparts who worry about surviving the present, newly tenured teachers often consider the future and wonder whether they can develop a career in teaching.

Past research indicates that the flat structure of the teaching career generally satisfied teachers (Huberman, 1993; Lortie, 1975; McLaughlin & Yee, 1988). McLaughlin and Yee (1988) found that the majority of teachers in their sample were content to spend the entirety of their career refining their skills in the classroom. These teachers generally eschewed advancement into positions of leadership or movement into different teaching assignments. As a result, they demanded little variety from their schools to support their career development. Due to this classroom focus and dominant career attitudes that venerated longevity in a workplace, school leaders did not have to provide teachers with an assortment of career development opportunities in order to retain them. Schools largely left teachers to develop their own careers within their classrooms and, to a great extent, this arrangement satisfied both parties.

Despite the general success of this arrangement, research indicates that it may not have been optimal. Like McLaughlin and Yee, Huberman (1989; 1992; 1993) found the Swiss teachers he interviewed in the 1970s and 1980s conceived of a teaching career within the confines of the classroom. However, Huberman discovered that teachers were most satisfied when they made “slight, spontaneous role shifts” over their teaching careers (1992, p. 131). Moreover, Yee (1990) found that teachers who took on roles beyond the classroom were more likely to remain in teaching than those who did not. Hart and Murphy (1990) found that such roles appealed particularly to the most capable new teachers. Thus, moving beyond the classroom may keep teachers more engaged and satisfied with their work and creating opportunities for such movement may help schools retain higher-quality teachers.

Today's teachers may be even more inclined than their predecessors to look beyond their classroom walls for career development. Studies suggest that today's newly tenured teachers may demand more options within the career of teaching than earlier generations of teachers (Johnson & The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers, 2004; Peske, Liu, Johnson, Kauffman, & Kardos, 2001). For these reasons, an exploratory study of current, newly tenured teachers' approaches to career development is warranted.

### ***Assumptions that Guide this Study***

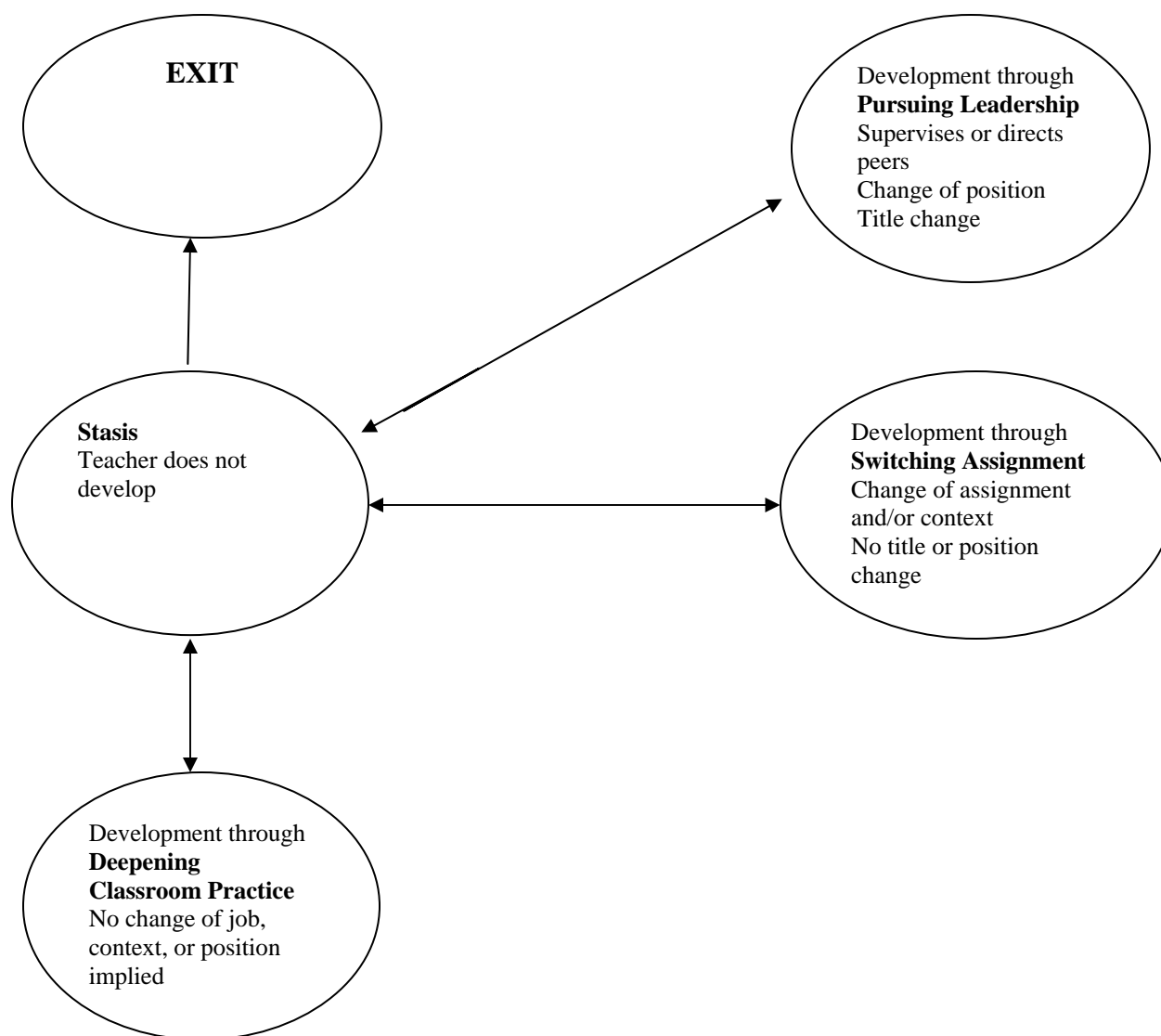
Theoretically, career development involves an individual, an organization, and a career structure. The individual, with personal dimensions such as gender (Sheehy, 1976), race (Alfred, 2001), age (Levinson, 1978), and work orientation (Holland, 1992; Schein, 1978), encounters a career structure that offers various paths, such as vertical advancement through promotion or horizontal transfer to new responsibilities (Schein, 1971). This occurs within a specific organizational context, such as a workplace that is non-hierarchical and family-run or one that operates as part of a large bureaucracy (Bolman & Deal, 1997).

Three related assumptions grow out of this interaction and form the foundation for this study. The first assumption is that teachers have distinct options for career development within their schools. The second assumption is that teachers have some choice or agency in their career development within and beyond schools. The third assumption is that the interaction of individual characteristics and organizational characteristics, in terms of the options provided by their schools, influences how individuals' teaching careers develop.

*A theoretical model of teacher career development.*

Figure 1 presents a model<sup>1</sup> that depicts the options for career development theoretically available to newly tenured teachers. I then offer potential explanations for how individuals might encounter the choices captured in this model.

**Figure 1—Theoretical Teacher Career Development Model: The Five Dimensions of Development a Newly Tenured Teacher May Face**



As depicted in Figure 1, newly tenured teachers may have the following options for development:

- *Exit*—teacher decides to leave teaching.

<sup>1</sup> This teacher career development model is influenced by Schein's (1971) framing of career paths.

- *Stasis*—teacher continues to teach but does not seek to develop beyond her present skills or to pursue new experiences.

In contrast to these two options, a teacher may pursue career development in teaching, which could take at least three forms:

- *Development through deepening classroom practice*—teacher pursues increased effectiveness in her current position and assignment (e.g. teacher engages in professional development over her career to improve her skills as a geometry teacher).
- *Development through switching assignments*—teacher changes assignment within or between schools and thus takes on new tasks, thereby developing new skills while continuing in her position as a full-time classroom teacher (e.g. twelfth grade English teacher becomes ninth grade English teacher).
- *Development through pursuing leadership*—teacher takes on a new position that changes her location in the school's formal hierarchy. In so doing, she takes on new tasks outside the classroom either part- or full-time and, in assuming a supervisory role, gains greater formal authority (e.g. teacher becomes curriculum specialist who teaches colleagues).

As conceived here, teacher career development could occur in different dimensions simultaneously. For example, the eleventh-grade social studies teacher who moves to ninth grade would likely deepen some of her original instructional skills but find other, new skills that ninth grade instruction requires of her. Thus, she would pursue deeper involvement in the classroom and move laterally by switching assignments.

### ***Individual and organizational influences on career development.***

This model also rests on a second assumption, that teachers have a degree of agency regarding their careers. It holds that they choose whether to become and remain teachers, where to teach, and how to develop a teaching career. Yet certain teachers logically have more agency than others. A

teacher with a chemistry degree from a selective university probably has more options outside teaching than her counterpart with an elementary education degree from a less-selective college. Similarly, this chemistry major may receive multiple job offers from a variety of schools while her colleague may have little choice in which job she accepts. Finally, some schools may offer a range of career development options, while others provide only a few. This range of possibilities leads to this study's third assumption: individuals' interpretation of options and their decision to pursue one alternative over another may be influenced by individual orientations, the organizational opportunities available at their school site, or some combination of individual and organizational factors.

Research suggests that there is wide variety in how people conceive of career and what they desire from their work (Alfred, 2001; Holland, 1992; Levinson, 1978; Schein, 1978; Sheehy, 1976). It follows that today's teachers, who hold diverse views about career (Johnson et al., 2004), vary in the kinds of career development they pursue. For example, teachers seeking "managerial competence" might choose to pursue administrative roles, whereas those drawn to "security and stability" might focus on deepening practice (Schein, 1978, p.128). Similarly, teachers who enter the profession at mid-career, after having established themselves in another profession, may be more interested in pursuing leadership than a 22-year old first-career entrant (Stein, 1996).

Individuals do not make career choices within a vacuum. To some degree, their knowledge of developmental possibilities and the presence of opportunities at the school site influence their development (Fessler & Christensen, 1992; Huberman, 1993). Indeed, the presence or absence of opportunities—to teach a new grade or to become a math coach, for example—may shape how a teacher conceives of her career development. Excellent professional development may prompt a teacher to pursue deepened involvement in classroom practice. Likewise, if she perceives the

professional development opportunities offered by her school to be superficial, she may prefer to switch assignment or pursue opportunities for leadership.

The literature on teacher career development suggests that choices within a career depend on some combination of individual differences and options that are available at the school site (Huberman, 1993; Yee, 1990). These individual and organizational factors probably interact as teachers decide how they want to develop, which is the final assumption on which this study rests.

To examine how this sample of twelve fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-year urban, public, high school teachers conceived of their development within a teaching career, this study addressed the following questions:

1. How do twelve fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-year teachers at urban public high schools describe and explain their past, current, and anticipated development within a teaching career?
2. How, if at all, does their career development relate to their decision to stay in or leave teaching?

To begin to build an empirically based framework for understanding the developmental choices of today's newly tenured teachers, this study examined the extent to which schools supported teachers' efforts, depicted in Figure 1, to deepen their classroom practice, pursue leadership, or switch assignment and how this support (or its absence) related to teacher retention or turnover.

## **Methods**

To explore how newly tenured teachers conceived of their career development, I conducted interviews with twelve teachers who worked in one of five public high schools.

### ***Sample Selection***

I selected five high schools within a large metropolitan area in the northeastern United States. I limited my sample to comprehensive high schools that were not engaged in large-scale reforms that altered the way teaching and learning occurred. For example, I avoided high schools that were

converting to schools-within-a-school. However, one school in the sample, Tremont, was a vocational school that was divided into academies, while the other schools employed a departmental structure. I further selected schools that, within the region, were somewhat similar in size, student racial and socioeconomic composition, and urbanicity. Thus, the sample includes three schools--Aresco, Tremont, and Cleary<sup>2</sup>--that constituted part of a large, urban district, East City, and two schools--Westview and O'Brien--that were the lone high schools in smaller cities nearby (See Table 1). In selecting schools, I imposed these constraints in order to maintain consistency in basic organizational characteristics across the sample. I chose to focus this study on teachers in urban schools because teacher support and retention is particularly challenging for urban and semi-urban schools serving high numbers of minority and low-income children (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004; Johnson, Kardos, Kauffman, Liu, & Donaldson, 2004; Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002; Loeb & Reininger, 2004).

**Table 1—Selected Schools**

<i>School</i>	<i>District</i>	<i>Student Enrollment</i>	<i>Student Free and Reduced Lunch (percent)</i>	<i>Student Race and ethnicity African American (percent)</i>	<i>Student Race and ethnicity Hispanic (percent)</i>	<i>Student Race and ethnicity White (percent)</i>	<i>Faculty size</i>
Aresco	East City	1470	61.6	24.4	48.7	22.7	65
Tremont	East City	1669	67.4	56.7	37.7	4.1	123
Cleary	East City	1190	63.9	70.2	23.6	5.0	67
Westview	Westview	1486	19.4	11.0	18.4	64.5	134
O'Brien	O'Brien	1666	55.1	18.7	24.9	48.0	137

Having selected the schools, I contacted teachers and administrators and requested the names of fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-year teachers. From these suggestions, I selected teachers purposively to build a sample diverse in gender, race, age, and subject matter. I further sought to include participants who entered teaching soon after college, “first-career” entrants, and those who began

<sup>2</sup> All proper names in this paper are pseudonyms.

teaching after a substantial period of time in another career, “mid-career” entrants. Only one participant, Jessica, entered teaching directly after college whereas other first-career entrants worked in non-teaching jobs for one to two years before beginning to teach. The characteristics of the sample are described in Table 2 below.

**Table 2—Self-Reported Background Information about Study Participants**

<b>Name</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Race/ethnicity</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Entry</b>	<b>Prior work</b>	<b>Years</b>
Frank	Aresco	Science	White	30	First-career	Sales Lab researcher	6
Mac	Aresco	Social Studies	White	50	Mid-career	Air force major	5
Deb	Tremont	Science	White	30	First-career	Chemist	5
Jasmine	Tremont	Math	Black	31	First-career	Administrative assistant	5
Carla	Cleary	Science	African American	27	First-career	Desegregation administrator	4
Julius	Cleary	Math	African American	31	First-career	Para-educator	4
Terrence	Cleary	Science	American*	36	Mid-career	Biomedical researcher	6
Amy	Westview	English	White	31	First-career	Aid in school for special needs children	4
Paul	Westview	Math	White	39	Mid-career	Engineer	5
Agatha	Westview	Special Education	White	30	First-career	Residential caseworker	4
Lacey	O’Brien	Social Studies	White	31	First-career	Head hunter	4
Jessica	O’Brien	Social Studies	White	25	First-career	None	4

\* Terrence identified himself as “a person of African descent” when interviewed.

### ***Data Collection***

I collected data for this study by conducting one sixty- to ninety-minute interview with each participant. All interviews occurred at participants’ schools between May, 2004 and September, 2004. Guided by a protocol (see Appendix A), I asked participants questions about their past and

current career development, their expectations for future development, and whether and how their school and district supported their development. I further explored whether and how participants considered the options embedded in my theoretical teacher career development model: deepening classroom practice, switching assignment, and pursuing leadership. All interviews were recorded and transcribed *verbatim*.

### ***Data Analysis***

To analyze the data, I coded the transcripts using emic and etic codes drawn from relevant literature and my theoretical model of teacher career development. To capture how individual and organizational factors interact, I constructed a thematic summary describing how each participant conceived of career development and how she viewed her school's influence on her development. To aid in cross-case analysis, I constructed categorical matrices detailing patterns pertaining to career development and retention. Looking across data from all participants, I wrote analytical memos to identify emerging cross-case themes and test their robustness. To guard against validity threats, I showed the data to others well-versed in relevant literature and checked my interpretations against theirs.

### ***Limitations***

Because this study is exploratory and based on a small, purposive sample, it is limited in several ways. The research design does not permit me to know how participants would have responded had they worked in other schools or received access to other career opportunities within their schools. In other words, this study does not permit causal conclusions, strictly defined. Moreover, the design does not permit me to generalize to other teachers' experiences or other urban high schools. Despite its limitations, this exploratory study offers new insight by examining whether and how a small group of newly tenured teachers felt their schools supported their career development. As such, it

explores uncharted terrain and suggests new ideas for research and practice regarding the support and retention of this important group of teachers.

### **Findings**

This study yielded four major findings. First, most of these newly tenured teachers sought to develop a teaching career that reached beyond their classroom. This contrasts with earlier research that found teachers more likely to concentrate, over their career, on deepening practice inside the classroom (McLaughlin & Yee, 1988; Huberman, 1993). Second, this study found that a distinct sub-group of these teachers entered the classroom intending to teach only short-term, no longer than five years. While a short-term orientation has been documented among new teachers (Peske et al., 2001), it has not been identified among teachers with tenure. Third, this study found that the schools in which these “short-termers” worked had enabled them to fulfill their goals for an abbreviated commitment to teaching by offering them leadership roles and new opportunities. At the time of the interviews, these people were preparing to leave the profession. Fourth, this study revealed that the remainder of the sample initially planned to teach long-term. However, due in part to their perception that their schools had failed to support their career development, many of them had reduced their projected length of stay in teaching. Overall, this study found that schools played a critical role in helping or hindering the career development of newly tenured teachers, thereby influencing their retention.

#### ***Developing a Teaching Career Beyond the Classroom***

The first major finding of this study is that, unlike their predecessors (McLaughlin & Yee, 1988; Huberman, 1993), these newly tenured teachers were developing their careers outside the classroom. While some participants concentrated on honing their instruction of a single subject and expected

this classroom focus to continue, many sought variety and change over their careers by moving into leadership roles or regularly changing their assignment.

***Deepening classroom practice: A new take on the traditional orientation.***

The classroom was the primary career focus for only two participants, Frank and Mac. However, unlike their predecessors who were content to spend their entire careers focused on deepening their classroom practice, Frank and Mac also expected to switch assignment and pursue leadership.

Frank, who entered teaching as a first-career teacher after college, taught science at East City's Aresco High School. In his nearly six years in the classroom, Frank explained: "I just wanted to focus on being a good teacher. That's pretty much what I focused on. Myself." Similarly, Mac, a fifth-year, mid-career social studies teacher in the same school, emphasized that he had been "learning a lot of teaching repertoires and pedagogy and stuff, but it was holding me back from my content area." Now that he felt comfortable with pedagogy, he was "focusing on the content area...so you're constantly growing."

As they considered the future, deepening their classroom practice was a predominant theme. Frank described how he saw his career developing: "I'm interested in science. . . I'm always on the new cutting edge in just different topics. Just like reading *National Geographic*, reading *Discover* magazine, my television choices coincide with what I do every day, which is teach science." As for future changes, Frank said he would need to

just keep abreast of what's going on in my field: science, chemistry. . . I want to be consistent with what I'm doing now. I don't see any drastic changes taking place. I definitely see myself growing with each new relationship and each new class that comes in.

In addition to their primary commitment to deepening their classroom practice, Frank and Mac expressed a secondary interest in pursuing leadership roles or switching assignment. Mac, a fifty-year-old retired Air Force major, explained, "I always like to have some control or influence" and,

thus, he wanted to pursue a lead teacher position. Frank, age 30, was considering a much longer teaching career than Mac. In order to stay energized in the work and avoid boredom, he said he would need to switch assignment. Frank explained,

Sometimes what gets to me is the same day. It's like Groundhog Day, the movie. You get in at 7:00, this same person comes in and says "good morning" to you, the same people walk by at the same time. . .I think if you can mix it up. . .change helps.

Although these participants echoed the classroom emphasis favored by earlier generations of teachers, they expected to widen that focus, especially as their teaching careers progressed. In contrast to Frank and Mac, the majority of the sample had not focused primarily on deepening classroom practice. Instead, these people emphasized switching assignments and taking on leadership roles.

***Switching assignments: Pursuing different courses or subjects.***

Several participants developed their careers primarily by switching assignments. To avert boredom and remain challenged, Paul had volunteered to teach new classes and Jasmine had switched from Tremont's science department to its math department.

Paul, a mid-career, fifth-year teacher at Westside, described his career development:

I've taught algebra, geometry, pre-cal, statistics, calculus. The only thing I haven't taught is advanced algebra. . .I get bored by teaching the same thing year in and year out, so when she's [the department head] offered a chance to teach different courses, I've jumped at it. Even though it's a lot of work the first year getting the material and understanding the requirements, I like to keep busy and I like to have something new to tackle.

For Paul, a former engineer and salesman, boredom and a desire for new challenges regularly prompted him to change course assignment.

Jasmine also changed assignments to gain new challenges and greater stimulation. As she explained, she switched classes and departments, from science to math:

When I've done Algebra I for one year, I'll take a year perfecting it. And then I'll move on. Done that. It's under my belt. Move on. That's kind of what happened, I think, in science

too. I did the Unified Science for two years, and I needed to move on. And I was in science but I was doing Active Physics. After that I needed to move on.

Without a new class to refine, Jasmine confided, “I get kind of antsy.” For this fifth-year teacher, “I’m always ready to try something different. That’s kind of how I got into math in the first place. I needed to be challenged. I need something different. I need, you know, a push.” Jasmine and Paul deliberately switched assignments as a strategy to remain interested and challenged as they built a teaching career.

***Becoming a leader: Taking on a position of authority while remaining a teacher.***

Other participants had developed teaching careers primarily by pursuing leadership opportunities. In their first four to six years of teaching, nearly all participants held leadership positions, even in these schools that were not explicitly engaged in reform. They served as lead teachers, union representatives, and professional development committee members, among other roles. For Carla and Amy, pursuing leadership roles was the dominant theme in their career development.

A first-career entrant in her twenties, Carla taught science at Cleary High School in East City. In her first four years of teaching, she rapidly moved into leadership positions to influence the practices of her school and district and to test her fledgling interest in administration and policy-making. As a teacher leader, Carla was “responsible. . . for implementing policy, and for leading other teachers in the building towards different policy changes.” Carla said that being a teacher leader “feels very empowering. It feels like I want more of that kind of experience.”

Like Carla, Westside English teacher Amy pursued leadership roles, such as accreditation steering committee member and the chief architect of a new ninth grade mentoring program. Amy had taken these roles partly because they were “important and sort of prestigious.” She also worried: “I think sometimes the alternative is, if we don’t do it, who will?”

As Carla and Amy demonstrate, some newly tenured teachers had focused on pursuing leadership early in their career rather than waiting ten to 15 years as veteran teachers traditionally have. They took on roles to test their interest in leadership and to gain influence and recognition in their schools and districts.

***Developing on several dimensions simultaneously.***

While many participants favored one, primary dimension of development—deepening classroom practice, switching assignment, or pursuing leadership—many pursued another dimension as a secondary interest. Mac, for example, was a representative on his school’s data committee and Carla switched assignment. Moreover, virtually all participants expected to develop their teaching careers both inside and outside the classroom.

Thus, these newly tenured teachers pursued development in different ways from their predecessors. Fear of boredom, desire for challenge, and a desire to exert influence caused these teachers to look beyond their classrooms in developing a teaching career. I now explore participants’ career intentions upon entering teaching. These individual orientations shaped the career development participants sought in schools.

***Bringing Different Intentions to the Teaching Career***

The second major finding of this study is that teachers brought different intentions to the teaching career, which influenced the career development they sought in schools. Of the twelve participants, three stated that, from the start, they intended to teach short-term and then move to another career. This short-term commitment has been identified among first and second-year teachers but not among those in their fourth through sixth year (Johnson et al., 2004; Peske et al., 2001). These short-termers found their career development supported by their schools and, at the time of the interviews, all three were exiting the classroom or expected to exit soon. The remaining nine participants said that, upon entering the classroom, they could envision a long-term career in

teaching. For these nine potential long-termers, schools offered differing levels of support for career development. Table 3 captures the four categories of teachers that emerged from the data: short-termers; potential long-termers who felt their schools supported their career development; potential long-termers who felt their schools neglected their career development; and potential long-termers who felt their schools obstructed their career development.

**Table 3—Participants’ Career Intentions and Perceived Support from Schools**

<b>Name</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Career Intention</b>	<b>School Response</b>
Carla	Cleary	Short-term	Supported
Jasmine	Tremont	Short-term	Supported
Amy	Westview	Short-term	Supported
Mac	Aresco	Potential long-term	Supported
Frank	Aresco	Potential long-term	Supported
Paul	Westview	Potential long-term	Supported
Lacey	O’Brien	Potential long-term	Neglected
Agatha	Westview	Potential long-term	Neglected
Jessica	O’Brien	Potential long-term	Neglected
Julius	Cleary	Potential long-term	Obstructed
Deb	Tremont	Potential long-term	Obstructed
Terrence	Cleary	Potential long-term	Obstructed

Although research indicates that newly tenured teachers have passed beyond the greatest danger zone of teacher attrition between years one and three (Huberman, 1993; Ingersoll, 2001), many of these teachers were considering leaving the profession due in part to their assessment that their schools could not support the development they sought. Interestingly, participants did not generally consider moving to more supportive schools a viable career option. As with new teachers (Johnson et al., 2004), these teachers’ decisions about whether to remain in the teaching profession were heavily influenced by their experience in their current schools. Some, the short-termers, had always intended to teach only briefly. Others initially planned to teach long-term, but working in schools

had tempered their commitment and truncated their timeline. Only one teacher of twelve, Frank, told me he could make teaching his life's work, from age 25 to retirement.

I now explore the findings, foreshadowed in Table 3, regarding the extent to which short- and potential long-termers' career development was supported by their schools and how this related to their retention. I present the cases of Carla, Mac, Lacey, and Julius to illustrate these findings.

### ***Short-Term Intentions Reinforced***

The third finding of this study is that the schools in which the three short-termers worked had reinforced their intent to leave teaching. Because they planned to teach only a short time, Carla, Jasmine, and Amy pursued numerous development opportunities with great intensity. In particular, they chose to pursue leadership roles instead of focusing on honing their craft in the classroom. Carla, a first-career science teacher at Cleary High School, exemplifies the short-term orientation and career development pattern.

#### ***Carla's story.***

Carla came to teaching having worked extensively with youth and, as an African American woman, demonstrated a strong commitment to being a "change agent" in her students' lives. A devout Christian, Carla held a life-long dream of becoming a minister, one reason she planned to teach for only a few years. She recounted,

When I went into teaching I kind of knew that my time would be limited in the classroom...having that outlook of wanting to be involved, wanting to be in that role. But also knowing that there would be the transitions...knowing there would be a change.

Three years at Cleary had confirmed for Carla "the destiny which I believe I'm here for...ministry and education is a part of that. Now that I've focused on the educational part, it's time to balance it out with the ministry part."

Carla's youth also influenced her short-term orientation. She explained, "If I were 50 with kids going on to college, then my life choice may be a little different...[but now] I can be choosy about

what I do along the way instead of, for lack of a better term, [being] stuck just as a classroom teacher.”

Confident she would teach for only a short time, Carla rapidly pursued leadership at Cleary and within the East City Public Schools (ECPS). She served as science lead teacher, technology support teacher, and representative to district-wide curricula and professional development committees. Over her short career, Carla said, “I wasn’t *just* a teacher...I became so entrenched in this job. . . my focus was very intense. It was all on Cleary High School.”

Cleary and ECPS provided an excellent setting in which Carla played out her short-term interests in teaching. District standards-based reform gave Carla an opportunity to participate in many initiatives and learn about education beyond her classroom. She reflected: “I think the school has been a good match for me because of all these transition periods... it helped me to see the evolution, the transitions of education.” Further, administrators offered Carla leadership roles that figured prominently in her development. She observed “my headmaster [and] the science department have really afforded me many opportunities to explore my role as a professional... I’ve gotten a crash course. And what some people take ten to 15 years to gain, I’ve been able to gain in, like, three.”

Carla’s heavy involvement in leadership roles and activities at the school and district level took its toll, however. The intensity of her involvement “definitely affected my energy level.” Exhausted, she said, “I just need a break.” Fatigued and convinced that she had experienced much of what teaching could offer, Carla planned to resign at the end of the school year. Asked if teaching long-term could entice her, Carla responded,

No, in the way of teaching in its most basic form, being in the classroom. Right now I feel like there are other things that I want to pursue. I’ll always be into the kids and I’ll always be part of the learning process. But I think I want to do it on a grander level.

***How individual and organizational characteristics interact.***

While Carla's interests in other careers and age fueled her short-term intent, Jasmine attributed her orientation to her need for change and greater status, while Amy tied it to a desire to raise a family. These interests had also caused them to pursue leadership and rapid change in their early teaching careers.

Upon entry, both Jasmine and Amy were convinced they would teach temporarily. Jasmine reasoned,

The [teaching] certificate is only good for five years. So I figured, when it runs out, there I go. Why renew it? I remember my second year the dean was saying "Oh, they're doing the new renewing of the certificates and you've got to get yours done because in three or so years yours will be expired." I was like, "in three or so years I won't be here." I kind of blew him off.

Amy intended to leave to have children, a well-documented career pattern among female teachers (Beaudin, 1995). She explained, "I always assumed I would just work at something and then perhaps, hopefully have enough money that I could be a stay-at-home mom."

Although Amy's reason for leaving teaching was traditional, her approach to career development was not. Rather than spend her early years before motherhood focused on her classroom, she started a freshman mentoring program, served on the plagiarism and scholarship committees, coached two sports, and advised two student organizations. She took on these roles and responsibilities in part because of her short timeline in teaching. She explained,

I'm a go-getter. I like to be very busy...I've always known that if I was going to become a mother that the side things were going to have to go. Knowing that there'd be a short term, a four-year bout of doing anything and everything, maybe that's part of it. I knew it wouldn't be long term, that I could do it.

While Amy was intent on leaving teaching to focus on motherhood, Jasmine expressed a more general need for change: "I think I get the two-year itch. Every two years I have to have some kind

of change.” Like Carla, she was interested in pursuing a doctorate, which she said would be “empowering.” She explained, “I see myself being on a college level...just to be more important...it sounds posh, ‘this is my daughter, Dr. Brown.’ But I was putting that off because I didn’t know what I wanted to study. Everybody’s like ‘Go for it. You know, you’re not married. You don’t have any kids. Go for your doctorate.’”

Knowing that she would teach temporarily, Jasmine, like Amy and Carla, pursued many opportunities. She became a teacher leader, conducted professional development, piloted science curricula, switched assignments, and pursued an honors course. She observed that, by the time she moved from Tremont’s science department to its math department, “I was so involved...they [her colleagues] got used to seeing me doing things.”

Like Carla’s, Jasmine’s school offered her many opportunities to develop a short career in teaching. In Jasmine’s case, the school’s chaos and staff turnover enabled her to receive the “crash course” described by Carla. Tremont was large and isolating and Jasmine’s students’ needs were acute. As a new teacher, she was assigned to a small learning community meant to foster collegial exchange and erode isolation but she learned about it only coincidentally, from a novice friend. She reflected, “there’s a lot of that that happens. Things that they don’t tell you that they expect you to know. Or you just find out on your own. Or people are just too busy or they don’t care. I don’t know.” Every day, she said, “you come in and you’re bombarded. I walk in the door. [Students say] ‘Miss! Miss! Miss!’” Precisely because of these challenges, Jasmine felt that Tremont had been a good place for her to develop a teaching career thus far. She said, “I think it would be a great place to learn because you either do or die here. . . I think it’s a great place for a new teacher.”

Tremont had periodically offered Jasmine new course assignments and opportunities to exercise leadership, thereby supporting her short-term intentions. These opportunities were available because of turnover and veteran disengagement. Jasmine recounted, “The new teachers were the

ones that were really active and the old teachers were waiting to see what would happen...they've seen it all before. 'Go ahead, new blood, new blood, you run around.'" Jasmine concluded, "The positions just come because no one else wants them. No one else wanted to do it and I was somewhat stable," in contrast to the turnover of her colleagues.

Although Amy's school was not as chaotic as Jasmine's, it employed veterans who were similarly disengaged. This allowed Amy to assume the leadership positions that interested her. She explained, "the same people get asked...all of the same young, reliable people...and the people who are sort of on their way out have cashed in their chips."

As Amy's story suggests, the interaction of individual characteristics and school context reinforced these participants' intent to leave teaching. For Amy, like Carla, fatigue and burn-out reinforced her short-term intentions. Amy explained "They're really nabbing all of the young teachers and asking them to do everything and people like me who don't say 'no' and constantly give and give and give, and are burning out as a result."

Jasmine's intent to leave had also been reinforced, but not as a result of burn-out. Jasmine felt the opportunities she had pursued had not been authentic or compelling. Asked why she took the teacher leader position, Jasmine responded, "I just think they needed a sucker...I was made a lot of promises with [assuming] the position. One was I would have to teach one less period so that I could observe other people and be more in a leader role. And that didn't happen." The lead teacher position did not have the influence she desired, which led her to conclude "I knew come hell or high water I wasn't coming back [to the science department]. I was, at first kind of, 'Well, I don't know, you know, I'm a teacher leader. *Oooh*. I have a say. *Oooh*. They like me. *Oooh*. But I can't stand it'...the changes were coming too slowly."

Amy was also disillusioned with the opportunities that had come her way. Recently she received a letter inviting her to serve on her school's accreditation steering committee. She said,

I'm tired. I know I've set myself up for some of this...I have to learn to say no. I think for the first time I got this letter, as much as I was like, "Wow. They thought of me highly enough to put me on the steering committee," I'm just getting a little more cynical in the sense that people are like, "It's an honor. You should be very flattered." I'm like, "Yeah, flattered, my ass."

### *Discussion.*

In sum, their schools provided these three teachers with numerous opportunities, which burned them out or disillusioned them and confirmed their original intent to leave teaching after a few years. At the time of her interview, Carla had decided to leave teaching to pursue a degree in ministry and a doctorate in education. When asked if administrators could have done anything to retain her, Carla said "there's really nothing they could have done. I think it's just that time."

Similarly, Amy declared "The light at the end of the tunnel for me right now, for next year, is I'm taking the rest of the year off to have a baby." Although past research documents a trend in which younger women "stop out" of teaching to raise children and then return (Beaudin, 1995), Amy said the high demands of her job made her hesitate to re-enter the classroom:

Having a baby is the biggest thing...I don't want someone else raising my child more than me. So that puts me in a bind. "This is the perfect job to have kids," people say. Okay. You come and be an English teacher and tell me it's the perfect job with kids. A girlfriend of mine is an English teacher and has two kids and she's drowning every single day. She says "I don't care. I don't try." I don't want students to suffer. I don't want to be like people who are counting the days to retirement...and I don't want my kids to suffer.

At the time of the interview, Jasmine continued to teach but was determined to exit in the next few years to pursue administration or a doctorate. She said she would stay "at least another year. We'll play it by ear." However, when asked whether she expected to teach five more years, Jasmine said, "No. I hope not. I need to get out...I need to go elsewhere. I need to see other places. I need to know other things."

Thus, Carla, Amy, and Jasmine's plans to stay in teaching for a short time were reinforced by their experiences in schools. Each of them crafted a short "career" in teaching marked by rapid

ascension into leadership roles and deliberate pursuit of variety rather than opportunities to deepen their classroom practice. Their path had been up into positions of authority, out of the classroom, and, ultimately, out of the school. For the most part, their schools complied with their expectations for career development, thereby providing fertile terrain in which these short-termers set down shallow, temporary roots.

Interestingly, administrators and more veteran colleagues may have misread these short-termers as promising future school leaders and, based on this interpretation, doled out scarce leadership opportunities to them. Carla's lead teacher predecessor told her "I can now leave, because you're here." Similarly, Amy stated "Nobody at my school is thinking about me not coming back." Schools may have invested in these early-career "go-getters" on the faulty assumption that that leadership opportunities would enhance their long-term commitment to teaching. Contrary to what school leaders might have expected, rapid promotion may have fortified these short-termers' intent to leave teaching after only a few years.

### ***Potential Long-Term Intentions Truncated***

The fourth major finding of this study is that schools generally had not supported potential long-term teachers' career development and these participants expected to leave teaching sooner than they had originally intended. Recall from Table 3 that a majority of potential long-termers felt their schools neglected or obstructed their career development. What underlay this absence of support?

In contrast to the short-termers' head-long, rapid entry into leadership roles, potential long-termers had paced their involvement in schools and were more likely to have emphasized deepening their classroom practice. They had long planned to teach and entered teaching expecting to make it their life's work. Lacey, a social studies teacher at O'Brien High School and former head hunter, offered a typical description:

I knew I wanted to teach. I tried something else and didn't like it. And I came to teaching knowing this is what I wanted to do. So I'm very excited to do it. I think there's some other new teachers who aren't sure yet. But I was sure from day one.

Expecting to teach for many years, these participants tempered their involvement and, relative to the short-termers, focused more on classroom practice. Even Paul, who volunteered to switch courses nearly every year, focused on improving his practice in the classroom and limited his involvement beyond it. He reported, "I always like to keep learning, even if a different text book comes in, just flipping through it and seeing if you can come up with new ideas." Even so, Paul tried to place boundaries on his involvement in schoolwork. He declared, "I try not to bring anything home on the weekends." This provides a sharp contrast with the intensity of the short-termers that dictated, in the case of Carla, "it was all on Cleary High School."

Although all of these participants initially expected to teach long term and, to some extent, paced themselves in their early years in the classroom, their schools offered varied support for their career development. Some teachers felt their schools had supported their expected development; these teachers said they would stay in teaching. For another group of participants, the schools had neglected their development. As a result, their commitment to teaching was tentative; all three participants said they might leave teaching. For a third group, their schools had obstructed their development. Two of three of this group said they would leave teaching imminently. As with short-termers, these participants' decisions about whether to continue teaching were heavily influenced by whether their schools supported the development they sought.

***Long-term intentions reinforced by school's support for career development.***

Three participants—Mac, Frank, and Paul—felt their development needs had been well supported by their schools and expected this support to sustain their continued work in the classroom. Mac provides an example of how an individual's development needs and a school's development offerings can align.

### Mac's story

As a fifth-year social studies teacher who entered the teaching career at age 45, Mac exhibited a strong interest in deepening his classroom practice through professional development. While his veteran colleagues objected to such sessions because they were not paid for attending them, Mac valued this professional development, as he explained,

Because I had a previous career, I felt that I had to compensate somehow for a lot of that lost time that I should be as smart as old as I look. I shouldn't be a rookie at my age. So I've tried to overcompensate for the lack of years in the discipline that I've had by going out and getting extra training.

Mac had found excellent opportunities to gain the "extra training" he sought. He said,

ECPS I've been very impressed with. I see opportunities in ECPS that aren't available to many of my counterparts even out in better suburban areas. . .We have weekly training. . .there's a lecture by a professor and it's free to us as long as we're willing to participate on a regular basis. . .That's a great program.

In addition, Mac had gradually taken on more responsibility by joining the data analysis committee and, last year, volunteering to mentor student teachers. Considering the future, he said he wanted to pursue a lead teacher position and felt Aresco would support this.

Overall, the alignment between Mac's individual development interests and the opportunities Aresco and ECPS had offered him made Mac feel supported and encouraged in developing a teaching career. He explained, "Having been in the service, I see the advantage of moving around and learning how different places operate. But if you're happy where you are, why would you throw that out the window and go for something else and find out you're not happy? I'm happy where I am." Thus, contemplating his long-term career plans, Mac declared, "I don't plan on doing anything but staying right here."

His resolve to stay in teaching and continue to work at Aresco High School was further confirmed by what he knew of other district schools. He reasoned,

Our school is pretty well under control. . . it's because everybody's on the same page. If I were to go to Hancock High or some other school, from what I understand, where the discipline problems are a lot worse, I think I would have less control over the classroom. Because if they're coming in from other classrooms where certain rules, behaviors aren't observed and reinforced...I've got to break them into my method.

Thus, the opportunities and the orderliness of Aresco convinced Mac to continue in teaching and to stay at this particular school. However, Mac's age also influenced his resolution to stay in teaching. He said "I've only got a 15, 20 year horizon. But for the person coming straight out of college or teaching, they should have some other, they're going to need something. 35, 40 years doing the same thing, you're going to get stale. It's just human nature."

### **How individual and organizational characteristics interact**

Like Mac, Paul and Frank's schools supported their development and, as a result, these teachers assessed the teaching career favorably. Recall that Paul's department head enabled him to change assignments, thereby supporting his need for variety over his career. The department head also assigned Advanced Placement Calculus to him, which fulfilled one of Paul's career goals. He explained "When I first came in, my goal was at some point to teach the highest level of math they offered. Next year I will be doing that, so in that way, I feel like I've reached one goal." Paul was also excited about the professional development sessions that accompanied teaching AP Calculus because he felt that the district's existing math professional development was too general. He said "I definitely want to take some AP seminars that are offered for not only new teachers but also veteran teachers, just kind of give them new ideas, keep them updated on what AP requirements are so that you can go back and help the students prepare for the AP exam."

In a different way, Frank's school also supported his career development needs. Recall that Frank expressed a strong interest in deepening his classroom practice over his career through individual pursuits, such as watching relevant television programs and reading magazines about science. As such, he reported that there was a match between his developmental needs and what

Aresco could provide: “I think it’s as easy as if they keep providing me with students. That’s their job, so they will. And I can keep on looking forward to the future and growing...they don’t necessarily need to do specific things.” Upon further thought, however, Frank said that “change helps” and Aresco could support his career development “by giving me different levels of kids, I suppose, but I’m content so far.”

### **Discussion**

The schools in which Mac, Paul, and Frank taught supported their career development needs and these three teachers were committed to teaching for many years. These schools provided support by offering new assignments, excellent professional development, and, to a lesser extent, opportunities to take on roles. These schools also promoted consistency and orderliness in the classrooms and halls. Frank, like Mac, declared, “I’ll retire from teaching.” Paul voiced a weaker, but still relatively strong commitment to teaching: “Well, when I’m 60, will I still be able to connect with the kids? Or will I still want to do this? I guess I don’t know. But I think the next ten or 15 years won’t be a problem, that I’ll still enjoy and still have the energy to do it.” However, for mid-career entrants Paul and Mac, short career horizons may have made them more inclined to commit to teaching. Paul said, “I don’t think I’ll ever get 30 years in” and explained, had he been a first-career entrant, he would not have been able to teach due to low pay. Paul and Mac committed to teaching 15 years more but they both felt that they could not have taught for the entirety of their adult work lives.

### ***Long-term intentions attenuated by school’s neglect of career development.***

In many ways, Mac, Frank, and Paul present the most positive story of this study, with their accounts of career expectations met, job satisfaction, and intent to remain in teaching. For the rest of the potential long-termers, the story is more troubling. In the case of three of the six remaining potential long-termers, the school neglected their career development. Lacey, Agatha, and Jessica

said their schools had not offered them the full range of development they sought. Thus far, they had devised ways to compensate for this absence of support by pursuing development opportunities outside school. However, they indicated that they might tire of creating their own development opportunities and demand much more from their schools in the future. Lacey's case illustrates many of these issues.

### **Lacey's story**

A social studies teacher at O'Brien High School, Lacey enjoyed her first four years in teaching and said she would like to continue to work in the classroom. As a graduate of a highly selective university, she represents the teachers some suggest should populate American classrooms (see, e.g. Podgursky, Monroe, & Watson, 2004). However, she was concerned that her school did not support her need for collegial exchange and that she, rather than her department head or principal, had to identify and initiate her own development opportunities. In part due to these concerns, she was unsure she would spend more than a few additional years in teaching.

One of Lacey's primary disappointments with teaching at O'Brien was its lack of collegial exchange. Comparing her progress as a teacher to that of a friend in a suburban school, Lacey said,

If I had fewer classes and I had colleagues who discussed teaching more, the department as a whole were more reflective, I think my practice would be better. And I would have advanced more... as a teacher I feel like I didn't get to grow as much as I would want.

Collegial exchange about teaching and learning was essential to her development as a teacher. "We celebrate birthdays," Lacey explained, but "rarely is the conversation about 'Hey, what are you doing in your class? What works? What doesn't work?'" She regretted that "You're so isolated. You might get really excited about a lesson, but you don't really get to go tell people about it." For Lacey, collegial exchange was one of the ways in which she wanted to build a career in teaching. However, O'Brien failed to support her in this manner.

More generally, Lacey felt she had to initiate many development opportunities. She said that her department head was reactive rather than pro-active about her development: “If I come to him with an idea, he tries to figure out how to make it work and he’s very supportive of that...but it’s generated largely from the self. And then you go find someone to be supportive.” For example, she wanted to start a committee to improve the school climate but, “again, this will be up to me, if I instigated it.”

In addition, Lacey had to look outside the school for ways to stay engaged and informed about teaching. In part because of “god awful” professional development, Lacey identified and enrolled in summer courses at two nearby universities. In a series of seminars on the Cold War, Lacey recounted,

We had professors come in and lecture. And we got to go to the university and do some reading assignments and do the history side. . .we, together as a group, found all sorts of primary sources on line--video, audio, text. And then we each made our website that we could use with the students integrating those primary sources. It was great.

In search of opportunities to bolster content and engage in collegial exchange, Lacey had to look beyond her classroom and school walls.

Although uneasy and disappointed with the lack of support for her career development, Lacey was content with teaching at the time of her interview. She said, “for the short term, I want to stay in teaching. I just have so much to learn.” However, there were signs that her satisfaction might soon wane. Considering her future in teaching, Lacey hesitated to commit long-term:

It’s inherent in the profession-- the way it’s set up right now, you don’t move up. You do the same thing the whole time. You have different classes and you can take on and create different challenges for yourself. And you get paid more every year. But you are still doing the same basic thing all the time...I’ll have to wait and see. I know I can do this for the next like five, probably 10 years, but I don’t know if I would want to do it...it’s purely about change and feeling like you’re developing as a human being and a professional.

Thus, Lacey’s plans regarding whether to remain in teaching had been shaped by her personal need to feel like she was “developing as a human being and a professional” and by O’Brien’s failure

to offer her opportunities to develop. Although O'Brien had differentiated roles to which Lacey might have aspired, such roles, as currently constructed, did not appeal to her. Regarding the curriculum coordinator, Lacey said, "I don't have very nice things to say about him. He hands you photocopied packets and tells us how great they are." For Lacey, staying in teaching would require authentic opportunities to advance. In her opinion, these opportunities did not currently exist at O'Brien.

### **How individual and organizational characteristics interact**

Like Lacey, Agatha and Jessica were supported in building a career in teaching. Agatha sought collegial exchange and better professional development but found she had to generate her own development opportunities. Jessica pursued development outside her school through a master's program in education. Agatha and Jessica, like Lacey, committed to teaching only for a few more years.

Agatha, a fourth-year teacher, felt that building a content base was essential to her work as a special education English teacher at Westside. Thus far, however, she had received little support in this venture. She recounted,

Everyone else is earning their PDPs [Professional Development Points] by going for the English content [but] I'm going to special ed meetings, Disabilities, Content, and Testing...that's frustrating. Most of what I do in the classroom, I've had to go out and see, I have good friends in the English Department. "Do you mind if I observe your class? What are you working on? What do you do for this?" So...I have to go seek that.

Like Lacey, Agatha's department head had been reactive rather than pro-active. She said,

If I'm interested in going to any professional development, I've never been denied... if I really researched something about English...I'd be approved to go. But I guess my disappointment is it's not right here for us. We have to go seek it out.

Jessica, who taught social studies with Lacey at O'Brien, also relied on external sources for career development. She said "I got out of undergrad four years ago, just got out of grad school. I don't need much from the school in terms of development. So I haven't really had to worry about how much they're providing me for developing as a teacher because I've been getting that outside."

However, Jessica had been persuaded that her desired development could come only from outside. Having decided to pursue teaching as a teenager and attended a college because of its strong education program, this potential long-termer had revised her career plan to cut her stint in teaching short. She had applied to a doctoral program in history, in part, for intellectual stimulation and exchange with colleagues. Asked why she was interested in pursuing a doctorate, she explained "one of the things I really liked about the graduate history program. . . was a lot more educational discussion and questioning theories." Jessica applied to a few doctoral programs during her fourth year of teaching and was not accepted. She planned to return for a fifth year and reapply.

Agatha planned to teach for slightly longer but, like Lacey, questioned whether she would be able to stay long-term. She was unwilling to commit longer because the teaching job itself, in her opinion, was becoming more difficult. Discussing how her work as a special educator had changed, she explained:

I don't know if I could retire in teaching. I don't know if I could. . . Because I'm young and I know I have a good 25 years ahead of me to reach that 80% or whatever, the retirement pay. . . it's too far in the future, especially when it's tough. It gets tougher. It continually gets tougher. I started here with a caseload of 17. Now I'm up to 27 in four years. What's it going to look like four years from now? That scares me a little.

Agatha's tentativeness also partially originated from her attitude towards careers. Asked whether she wanted to teach until retirement, Agatha said "I went from criminal justice to special education. I don't know, maybe something else totally. I don't know." Agatha expressed reluctance to commit to one career for the duration of her adult work life. Research on new teachers (Johnson et al.,

2004) and today's younger generation of workers (Editors, 2000) has revealed similar ambivalence towards committing to a single career.

### **Discussion**

In short, their schools failed to support the career development needs of these three teachers. Lacey, Agatha, and Jessica wanted to develop a lengthy career in teaching when they stepped into the classroom. Thus far, they had found ways to stay engaged in teaching and develop their careers. As relatively young teachers, they worried their schools would not provide the developmental opportunities they required to teach long-term. They said they would leave if they did not receive the support to do their classroom work well, a lower case load in Agatha's case, and opportunities to increase authority and influence, in Lacey's case. Jessica, by contrast, had truncated her commitment to teaching; she seemed determined to leave to pursue a doctorate. All criticized their schools for lack of collegial, intellectual exchange. This is especially striking since Lacey and Jessica worked in the same school and department and could have worked together on curriculum and planning.

#### ***Long-term intentions shortened by school's obstruction of career development.***

Julius, Deb, and Terrence, the remaining three participants who might have made teaching a career, worked in schools that had inhibited their career development. In part due to these obstacles, these three participants planned to exit teaching. Julius provides a case of how the interaction between individual needs and organizational offerings influences overall career decisions.

#### **Julius' story**

In some ways, Julius is exactly the sort of teacher urban districts want to retain. An African-American graduate of a selective, ECPS high school, Julius considered law before choosing to teach youth whose lives somewhat mirror his own. Currently a fourth-year math teacher at Cleary, Julius became a teacher after spending three years as a paraprofessional in two East City schools. Despite his long preview of teaching, he did not expect Cleary to obstruct his development. Once hopeful,

at the time of his interview he was disillusioned and exhausted and intended to leave teaching in the next few years. “Only God,” he said, could alter his decision to leave teaching.

From an early point in his time at Cleary, Julius focused on deepening his classroom practice. Partially, this was due to his strong interest in developing positive relationships with students but, as Julius grew familiar with the school, it also became a response to the Cleary’s “politics.” In his second year, Julius accepted a position directing a program for ninth-grade repeaters because, as he said, “I really saw it as an opportunity to be left alone. . . you get to create your own curriculum. As long as you put out results, they don’t bother you.”

Although he enjoyed this opportunity and the autonomy it conferred to him, the program was eliminated and, since then, school dysfunction had distracted him from classroom practice.

Although he had occupied many leadership roles outside work, at Cleary

I try to stay away from the politics of the school as much as possible and when you take a leadership role in school you have to deal with politics. Would I like to be on the school senate? Yes. Would I like to be on the school parent council? Yes. All those other things, yes, but that means involving myself in the politics of the school. I don’t need that. That takes away from my teaching.

Politics, in Julius’ mind, meant “you’re told you have to be someplace, somewhere, sometime, but you’re not told how to get there. So when you create a way you’re told that’s against the rules.” He continually encountered these obstacles, which stunted his interest in pursuing leadership and amplified his resolve to focus on deepening his classroom practice.

Julius found little support for this focus on the classroom, however. Professional development had been “a waste of time,” according to Julius, because it “does not apply to the students we now have. . . it’s not for urban students.” On a more basic level, chaos in the school regularly interrupted his classroom work. He explained,

I got tired with kids telling me, “I can do whatever in this class.” . . I was tired of going into other people’s classrooms, first years and several years, and telling them to put their house in order because they are preventing the whole wing of the building from learning.

Impeded in deepening his classroom practice or pursuing leadership roles at Cleary, Julius had taken steps to leave teaching. At the end of his third year, he applied to become an administrator in the district. He was not accepted, but his resolve to leave teaching remained strong, in large part due to the dysfunction of Cleary. He explained,

The kids knew it, last year I was really, really ready to walk away. I was coming in late every day because I knew they couldn't fire me. I was begging out. For me, the building was sick and it wasn't until one of the kids said, 'Dag, Mister, you're late every single day,' that I was like, that's not customary for me. I have to change that.

At the time of his interview, Julius was looking for options outside teaching. He said "I'm done with high school politics. I eventually plan on going out of the classroom and teach teachers to teach." He planned to leave teaching because "I don't directly have control over my complete environment. If I know that people are doing what they're supposed to do beneath me, then I can stay longer."

Some might inquire why Julius had not simply found a better work environment than Cleary, which, Julius reported, had been deemed "the worst school in the city" by a local newspaper. Surveying other schools, Julius declared, "I refuse to go to a suburban school because I can't really relate to those kids...urban schools I can work in, but if people don't do their job it takes a lot out of me. And I have never known an urban school to be extremely supportive."

He concluded that Cleary and East City could do nothing to keep him in teaching:

It's too big for them. I think God is the only one who has the power to do it. Because I see what's going on beneath me in the different generations [students] and I see how the generation above me [administration] is choosing to handle it...ECPS, the state education department really don't want to change and there's nothing I can do about that.

Julius continued to teach one day at a time, but it was clear that he would soon exit the classroom.

### **How individual and organizational characteristics interact**

Like Julius, Deb and Terrence reported their schools had obstructed their development. Deb taught science at Tremont with Jasmine, although she worked in a different academy within the school. Terrence also taught science, but at Cleary, with Julius and Carla. Deb and Terrence had both entered teaching after working in research. Deb had run a laboratory and, at only 24, received and administered research grants as large as \$700,000. Terrence had considered medical school before committing to teaching. Both spoke about how their schools had not generally supported their career development. When asked if Cleary presented opportunities for him to develop a career, Terrence said,

Not very many. . .The building has been frankly quite chaotic over the last several years, fights all over the place, fire alarm being pulled a couple times a day...you're in the middle of an exam and the fire alarm goes off. So it's like starting from square one all over again. So that has stymied the sense of professional academic desire even to move forward or to try to increase your own academic professionalism.

Terrence further explained that “when students are allowed to trample, when that element of order is not present, students feel more at liberty to be disrespectful to teachers and that has been very difficult on a lot of teachers.” For Terrence, like Julius, the disorder of Cleary impeded his development of a career in teaching.

Deb's school obstructed her career development similarly. For her, administrators' disrespect of her classroom teaching was a theme:

People really don't respect classroom space and time. . .Administrators just walk in and you're in the middle of a sentence and they'll just go, “Can you do this right now?” and you're like, “You know what? I'm in the middle of a class. I'm in the middle of a sentence. And you need to come back later.” And they'll be all like, “You're a trouble-maker.”

Both Terrence and Deb considered their colleagues as they tried to build a career in teaching. The incompetence of Terrence's colleagues caused him to question the integrity of the teaching profession. Terrence recounted a story in which one of his former students told him that “nothing”

was being taught in her physics class. He advised the student to talk to the teacher and then the administration, which she did, but nothing changed. Acknowledging he “felt powerless” and that “the system was failing her,” Terrence eventually confronted the physics teacher, who told him, “As long as I can get them to do something, that was an accomplishment for him.” This veteran’s response frustrated and dismayed Terrence. He wondered “Wow, is that really what teaching has come to? Here I am and is that what I’m sort of to look at as a model?” Although Terrence rejected the “temptation” this model presented, he said that “the fact that it was happening right in front of me,” without administrative intervention, “almost sanctioned what was going on.”

In general, Terrence saw little support at Cleary for the basic work of teaching and learning. Teachers disrespected students, students disrespected teachers, and the administration did not intercede. This rampant disrespect, he observed, “suppresses the morale of teachers.”

Beyond their failure to provide basic support for teaching and learning, these schools failed to promote the kinds of activities that these teachers felt developed careers. For Deb, collegial exchange would have helped her develop a career in teaching. However, she explained, “Here we’re very isolated. If I want to see the other chemistry teacher, I have to go down and go over there and then he’s not there...and then I have 45 minutes a day really free. So we don’t ever talk. And in our professional development time, people are talking at us.” Thus, when asked if Tremont provided adequate opportunities to develop a teaching career, Deb responded “I don’t think it’s been a primary concern of anyone but me...because if I want to do something, it’s all on my own.”

Despite the barriers of time and space, Deb had tried to initiate collaborative work with colleagues. However, she reported, “I can’t get them to talk with me.” She explained “if we try to talk about teaching and science, it comes down to supplies...it took me three years to get ten stop watches. . . So most of the conversations about teaching here with science teachers, there’s so much anger about the lack of supplies that they don’t go too far.”

For Terrence and Deb, the lack of support at their schools for developing a career in teaching had pushed them to explore other options. Although each had found a way to operate in his or her school, this coping came with a price. Speaking about scant supplies, Deb explained,

I'm just a bitch. I'm a horrible, horrible, horrible bitch... I fill out a requisition form and I keep on, I just go, "Give me this. I need that." . . . I go, "No, now. I said I need it now." And they're like, "No, we can't do it," and I'm like, "You're going to do it."

She had adopted a similar response to administrators who interrupt her classes: "My general response [is] 'You need to come back later.' I have to be a bitch, you know. And you're left with no options, because people will come in every two seconds...is it really necessary? Do they think that nobody does anything in class?"

Deb responded to the stresses of her school by developing a protective shell rather than building a career as a professional. This theme of prevention and protection rather than growth and positive development prevailed in Julius' experience as well. Like Julius, Deb was seriously considering leaving teaching at the time of the interview. She explained, "I'm thirty and I say to myself, 'How long can I do this?' I've been doing it for a few years now and it just wears you out....I want to enjoy my life. I don't want to always be depressed." Deb perused job listings frequently and thought often of moving into other lines of work or back into her original job as a chemist.

Although Terrence's description of his school was less bleak than Julius' or Deb's, he was ready to leave the classroom and "leaning towards administration." Originally repelled by this career option, Terrence had come to view becoming a principal as a way to reduce "toleration for disruption" at schools like Cleary and, thus, change the very conditions that had impeded his career development in teaching. As the primary breadwinner for his family of six, Terrence was also attracted to administrators' higher salaries. In a different way, Deb was also influenced by family demands. She said having children would force her to leave teaching because, emotionally, she could not balance the demands of being a parent and a teacher at Tremont simultaneously.

## **Discussion**

Julius, Terrence, and Deb entered teaching excited about the work and willing to commit to the profession long-term. A few years later, they were disillusioned and convinced that teaching in urban high schools could not sustain them professionally. By failing to uphold standards of student behavior and teacher professional practice, Tremont and Cleary undermined these individuals' determination to teach. By neglecting their individual needs for career development, these schools caused them to look elsewhere to develop more productive, enjoyable careers. Julius had tried to exit once and would do so again. Terrence was leaving teaching to pursue administration and Deb was fairly convinced she would soon leave. By obstructing these teachers' career development, Cleary and Tremont High Schools pushed these teachers to exit, thus wasting the potential long-term contribution these three individuals could have made in the classroom.

## **Discussion**

This study revealed four major findings. First, unlike the retiring generation of teachers, these participants were developing their careers beyond the classroom. Second, these participants either entered teaching with short-term intentions, to teach no longer than four or five years, or potential long-term intentions, to build a lengthy career in teaching. Third, the short-termers in this study developed their careers primarily by pursuing multiple leadership roles; their schools supported their career development and, at the time of the interviews, they were preparing to leave teaching. Last, potential long-termers developed their careers by pursuing deepened classroom practice and through the other dimensions. The majority of long-termers worked in schools that undermined or left their career development largely to chance. These participants reported that, as a result, they had decreased their commitment to teaching and reduced their expected length of stay in the classroom.

Interestingly, when support for career development did exist in schools, it seemed to help retain long-termers but propel short-termers to leave.

Urban schools face great challenges in retaining teachers, which some scholars cast as a problem of new teacher turnover (Ingersoll, 2001). However, this study shows how experienced, relatively invested teachers decided to leave urban schools. The first clear route to exit was the “up and out” attrition of the short-termers. These teachers rapidly assumed leadership positions, exhausted the options their school provided, and left teaching fatigued and convinced they had experienced all teaching could offer. This pattern might surprise school administrators and veteran colleagues, who perhaps assumed that these “go-getters” would become the next generation of formal and informal teacher leaders. To the extent that these participants were good teachers on whom their schools relied, this pattern is particularly troubling. It is also alarming in that short-termers’ emphasis on pursuing opportunities outside the classroom may have distracted them from providing high-quality instruction inside the classroom. Lastly, this pattern is problematic to the extent that short-termers monopolized leadership positions, thereby preventing schools from using such roles to sustain and retain potential long-termers.

The second route to exit is even more disturbing, however. Among the potential long-termers, a “down and out” pattern emerged in which schools obstructed individuals’ career development and, as a result, they attempted to leave teaching. After trying to develop in different dimensions, Julius and Deb, for example, gave up on pursuing development and entered stasis. They shut down, arrived at school late, in Julius’ case, and became “a horrible bitch” in Deb’s example. Rather than cultivating a long-term, productive career in teaching, they developed a protective shell that allowed them to survive each day. Students surely suffered from these teachers’ stress and surrender. It may, in fact, be better for students if teachers in stasis exit. However, as Julius’ case demonstrates, exit may not be readily available.

A variation on this route to exit was experienced by those whose schools neglected their development. Lacey, for example, had not entered stasis but her resolve to stay in teaching had eroded over time. Compared to Julius, her “down and out” route may not be as dramatic or potentially harmful to students, but she may eventually look for other careers that satisfy her need for advancement.

Thus, this exploratory study helps to explain how and why some teachers may leave high-poverty, high-minority, urban schools (Hanushek et al., 2004; Lankford et al., 2002; Loeb & Reininger, 2004). In this study, urban schools provided fertile terrain on which newly tenured teachers could take on multiple responsibilities in the short-term and then leave teaching. However, they seemed to provide barren ground on which the majority of these teachers might cultivate a long career.

The findings were not wholly negative, however. The schools that employed Frank, Mac, and Paul supported and retained these newly tenured teachers by being orderly and consistent and by offering opportunities to change assignment and receive content-specific professional development. However, because two of the three of these participants were mid-career entrants and all three were particularly interested in deepening classroom practice, they might have been less inclined to leave teaching. Specifically, mid-career teachers may be more inclined to stay due to their shorter retirement horizon and greater family demands. Additionally, urban and semi-urban schools may be better able to support teachers who want to develop a career by deepening their practice than those who expect to switch assignment or pursue leadership. Indeed, this is the traditional way teachers have developed careers and it requires less effort from the school than developing leadership roles or providing opportunities to teach different courses or grades.

In sum, to retain high numbers of newly tenured teachers, urban schools may not be able to rely on assumptions regarding teacher career development and retention that have served them in the

past. First, schools cannot assume that newly tenured teachers have committed to lengthy teaching careers. The short-termers in this study clearly challenged that assumption. Second, schools cannot assume that newly tenured teachers expect to develop solely by deepening classroom practice. While the classroom focus may have satisfied veteran teachers (McLaughlin & Yee, 1988), most teachers in this study expected new opportunities outside their classroom. Third, schools cannot assume that these teachers are content to develop their careers on their own. These teachers wanted supervisors and colleagues to play a key part in their development. The career development needs of these newly tenured teachers suggest that the days of the lone teacher, tinkering year after year in her classroom (Huberman, 1989), may be in decline.

As noted previously, this study is limited by its small, purposive sample and exploratory nature. Keeping in mind these limitations, this study suggests that schools may need to change in order to support and retain newly tenured teachers. As a first step, the findings suggest that schools might better support newly tenured teachers by promoting order and consistency. As a second step, schools might institute more opportunities for collegial exchange about curriculum and pedagogy and districts might develop more leadership opportunities for newly tenured teachers. Appointing an administrator within the school to oversee teachers' career development could help tailor opportunities to individual teachers, thus supporting them further.

Before broad conclusions can be made and policies designed, however, more research is needed. Further qualitative studies could probe the relationship between teacher career development and retention and investigate this relationship in different settings, among different types of teachers. When their schools blocked their development, why did these teachers fail to see switching schools as a viable option? Do elementary-level teachers express expectations for career development that are similar to those of these secondary-level teachers? Studies could also examine teacher career development from the school's perspective. Does the opportunity to switch assignment improve a

teacher's instruction, which might improve student achievement, or merely keep the teacher from becoming bored, which might have no impact on student performance? Does a school's focus on individual teachers' career development inhibit the development of a collaborative teaching culture? Lastly, quantitative research based on a random sample would provide generalizable findings regarding how individual characteristics, organizational characteristics, and career opportunities may interact to predict retention. Are African-American women more attracted to short-term teaching careers than women of other races or African-American men? Are mid-career entrants more inclined to pursue depth than first-career entrants? Addressing such important questions requires quantitative research based on large, random samples.

For many of these newly tenured teachers, urban schools provided barren ground on which to develop a long-term teaching career. Although *some* schools supported *some* teachers' career development, this study suggests that those instances appeared to be the exception, not the rule. To cultivate fertile ground on which newly tenured teachers might develop a lengthy career, we must begin to take teacher career development seriously. Only then will schools sustain and retain these teachers on whom the future of urban education depends.

## REFERENCES

- Alfred, M. (2001). Expanding theories of career development: Adding the voices of African-American women in the white academy. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 51(2), 108-127.
- Beaudin, B. Q. (1995). Former teachers who return to public schools: district and teacher characteristics of teachers who return to the districts they left. *Educational Evaluation & Policy Analysis*, 17, 462-475.
- Bolman, L. G., & Deal, T. E. (1997). *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership* (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Editors. (2000, January 29). The future of work: Career evolution. *The Economist*, 89-90.
- Fessler, R., & Christensen, J. C. (1992). *The teacher career cycle: understanding and guiding the professional development of teachers*. Needham Heights: Allyn and Bacon.
- Guskey, T., & Huberman, M. (1995). *Professional development in education: New paradigms and practices*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Hanushek, E. A., Kain, J. F., & Rivkin, S. G. (2004). Why public schools lose teachers. *Journal of Human Resources*, 39(2), 326-354.
- Hart, A. W., & Murphy, M. J. (1990). New teachers react to redesigned work. *American Journal of Education*, 98, 224-250.
- Holland, J. (1992). *Making vocational choices: A theory of vocational personalities and work environments*. Odessa, FL: Psychological Assessment Resources.
- Huberman, M. (1989). On teachers' careers: Once over lightly, with a broad brush. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 13(4), 347-361.
- Huberman, M. (1992). Teacher development and instructional mastery. In A. Hargreaves & M. G. Fullan (Eds.), *Understanding teacher development* (pp. 122-142). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Huberman, M. (1993). *The lives of teachers*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Ingersoll, R., & Smith, T. (2003). The Wrong Solution to the Teacher Shortage. *Educational Leadership*, 60(8), 30-33.
- Ingersoll, R. M. (2001). Teacher turnover and teacher shortages: An organizational analysis. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38(3), 499-534.
- Johnson, S. M., Kardos, S. M., Kauffman, D., Liu, E., & Donaldson, M. L. (2004). The support gap: New teachers' early experiences in high-income and low-income schools. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 12(61).
- Johnson, S. M., & The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers. (2004). *Finders and keepers: Helping new teachers survive and thrive in our schools*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Lankford, H., Loeb, S., & Wyckoff, J. (2002). Teacher sorting and the plight of urban schools: A descriptive analysis. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 24(1), 37-62.
- Levinson, D. (1978). *The seasons of a man's life*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Loeb, S., & Reiningger, M. (2004). *Public policy and teacher labor markets: What we know and why it matters* (policy report). East Lansing: The Education Policy Center at Michigan State University.
- Lortie, D. C. (1975). *Schoolteacher: A sociological study*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- McLaughlin, M. W., & Yee, S. M.-L. (1988). School as a place to have a career. In A. Lieberman (Ed.), *Building a professional culture in schools* (pp. 23-44). New York: Teachers College Press.

- Murnane, R., & Phillips, B. (1981). Learning by doing, vintage and selection: Three pieces of the puzzle relating teaching experience and teaching performance. *Economics of Education Review*, 1(4), 453-465.
- Peske, H. G., Liu, E., Johnson, S. M., Kauffman, D., & Kardos, S. M. (2001). The next generation of teachers: Changing conceptions of a career in teaching. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 83(4), 304-311.
- Podgursky, M., Monroe, R., & Watson, D. (2004). The academic quality of public school teachers: An analysis of entry and exit behavior. *Economics of Education Review*, 23(5), 507-518.
- Rockoff, J. (2003). *The impact of individual teachers on student achievement: Evidence from panel data*. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Schein, E. H. (1971). The individual, the organization and the career: A conceptual scheme. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 7, 401-426.
- Schein, E. H. (1978). *Career dynamics: Matching individual and organizational needs*. Reading, MA: Addison Wesley.
- Sheehy, G. (1976). *Passages: Predictable crises of adult life*. New York: Dutton.
- Smylie, M. A. (1995). New perspectives on teacher leadership. *Elementary School Journal*, 96(September), 3-7.
- Stein, R. L. (1996). *Incongruities in the midcareer transition to teaching: a theoretical framework*. Unpublished Qualifying Paper, Harvard University Graduate School of Education.
- Yee, S. M. (1990). *Careers in the classroom: When teaching is more than a job*. New York: Teachers College Press.

## APPENDIX A

### Interview Protocol

I am interested in learning about how you view your development over your career in teaching and education more broadly. I'm going to ask you about your choices within your teaching career so far and how personal and school or district factors have influenced how you think about teaching as a career.

1. What attracted you to teaching in the first place? Why did you become a teacher?
2. Tell me about the positions you've held in your teaching career so far.
 

*Probes:*

  - School locations
  - Subject/grades taught
  - Positions in your school or district outside of being a classroom teacher
  - Why have changes occurred?
  - Who initiated those changes? Why?
3. Has teaching been what you expected it to be? Why or why not?
4. Looking back at the last four/five/six years, what have been significant moments in your teaching career so far? Why are these moments important to you?
4. Has your teaching practice changed over the past four/five/six years?
 

*Probes:*

  - How has it changed?
  - What caused it to change?
  - Who initiated these changes?
  - Did professional development play a role in these changes?
5. You've told me about your work inside the classroom. Has your work as a teacher in the larger school changed over the past 4/5/6 years?
 

*Probes:*

  - How has it changed?
  - What caused it to change?
  - Who initiated these changes? Was the school a factor?
6. Has your school or district offered you opportunities to grow (develop as a teacher or educator) over the past 4/5/6 years? Which have appealed to you? Why?
 

*Probe:*

  - Teaching practice (professional development?)
  - Increased responsibilities (new roles)

7. Looking forward, are there particular opportunities to grow that you'll seek out in the next phase of your teaching career? How would you like your teaching career to develop? Describe the development/growth opportunities that appeal to you and do not appeal.

*Probes:*

Greater mastery  
New challenges in the classroom  
New position in school  
Other ways of developing

8. Is there a match between how you want to develop and what your school or district offers? Explain. Does this match/mismatch have any impact on how you think about continuing in teaching?

9. Looking back, has teaching as a career been a good fit for you over the course of the past 4/5/6 years? Why or why not?

*Probe:*

Satisfaction: increasing, decreasing, or stayed the same?  
Why?  
How satisfied with teaching are you now?

10. Looking forward, does teaching offer a "good fit" for you as a long-term career? Why or why not?

*Probes:*

Race, gender, age  
School role in this decision

11. How long do you plan to stay in teaching?

*Probe:*

Will your family influence your decision?

*If respondent plans to leave:*

What would it take to keep you in teaching longer?

12. What do you know now about teaching that you didn't know when you began your first year? Does this information influence how you think about teaching as a career?

13. Is there anything I haven't asked you that you think is important for me to know about your teaching experience, your career goals, or teaching in general?

**APPENDIX B**  
**Information Sheet**

1. Name:
  
2. Contact information:
  - a. E-mail:
  - b. Mailing address:
  - c. Phone:
  
3. Gender:
  
4. Race/Ethnicity:
  
5. Age:
  
6. Have you been teaching continuously since college?
  - a. If not, what sort of work did you do before teaching? How long did you do this work?
  
7. Are you certified?
  - a. Through what program?