

The retention question in context-specific teacher education: Do beginning teachers and their program leaders see teachers' future career eye to eye[☆]

Eran Tamir^{*}

Brandeis University, Mandel Center for Studies in Jewish Education, 415 South St., MS 049, Waltham, MA 02454, USA

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the challenge of retaining teachers in hard-to-staff schools by examining how it is addressed in three context specific teacher education programs, which prepare teachers to teach in urban public, urban Catholic, and Jewish Day Schools in U.S.A. The findings of this study suggest that counter to teaching force trends teachers from the three programs that we studied expressed high motivation to serve as teachers or leaders in their particular schools and communities. In particular, we found that teachers' career commitments developed around the religious or civic missions promoted by their respective programs. Finally, teachers' career perceptions seem to correlate, though not entirely match, with those of their program leaders.

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1. Introduction

In contrast to previous generations of teachers who tended to teach until retirement, today's teachers expect to have more than one career (Johnson & The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers, 2004; Margolis, 2008; Peske, Liu, Johnson, Kauffman, & Kardos, 2001). Teaching force data confirm this assertion demonstrating that teachers are increasingly moving between schools or leaving teaching all together in large numbers after relatively short periods of service (Ingersoll, 2001; 2003). Furthermore, the most likely to leave or move are teachers in under resourced urban schools or in private parochial schools (see: Cook & Engel, 2006; Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002; Schaap & Goodman, 2001). This

inability of schools to maintain a stable teaching force over significant periods of time is cited as a major impediment for creating and maintaining school efficiency (Ingersoll, 2003) and teacher quality (e.g., Ingersoll, 2001; Quartz and The TEP Research Group, 2003).

This paper discusses the retention challenge by examining how it is addressed in three context specific teacher education programs, which prepare teachers to serve in urban, Catholic, and Jewish Day Schools. I raise the following questions; a) how and in what terms do beginning teachers of these programs think about their likely careers, b) what kind of careers do program leaders hope their graduates will pursue? For example, do context-specific programs want their graduates to remain in the classroom or would they also feel satisfied if graduates left the classroom to become educational leaders in their respective schools and communities? And c) to what extent do the career aspirations of teachers converge with program leaders' perspectives? For many programs, like those in our sample, which were established with a particular mission in mind, the latter question touches on a critical issue, that is, to what extent are they effective in providing schools the professional teachers they need.

This study is designed to illuminate three unique aspects that were rarely discussed in previous research. First, this research project is comparative, focusing on three teacher preparation programs and their respective educational sectors (i.e., Jewish, urban Catholic, and urban public education), where the challenge of

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^{*} Tel.: +17817362072.

E-mail address: etamir88@brandeis.edu

retaining teachers has been significant, and where teacher attrition is an ongoing problem. Second, the teacher population in this research represents a group of individuals who have been prepared in some of the most selective U.S. colleges, which also make them the least likely to leave hard-to-staff schools, which in the U.S. is usually a code name for urban schools serving disadvantaged minority groups (e.g., Henke, Chen, & Geis, 2000; Ingersoll, 2003; National Commission on Teaching for America's Future, 2003; Rockoff, 2004). Third, the three teacher preparation programs where these teachers were prepared represent a unique approach to teacher preparation that emphasizes the importance of preparing teachers in specific ways to serve in particular school context that cater specific communities. These unique aspects of the study, as well as their potential implications for the three school sectors can be informed by the relatively small but purposeful sample used in this study (I return to this point later).

This study hypothesizes that context-specific teacher preparation may help address some of the problems associated with the attrition of beginning teachers. In principal, such training intends to help teachers be better prepared and feel more motivated and committed to teach in the particular schools that interest them, which, in turn, may make them more likely to succeed and then stay. The findings of this study suggest that teachers from the three programs that we studied expressed high motivation to serve as teachers or leaders in their particular schools and communities. In particular, we found that teachers' career commitments developed around the religious or civic missions promoted by their respective programs. Finally, teachers' career perceptions seem to correlate, though not entirely match, with those of their program leaders.

I start with a brief review of what we currently know about teacher career and the problem of early attrition in urban public schools, urban Catholic schools, and Jewish day schools in the U.S. I will continue with a discussion that seeks to offer insights into teachers' career aspirations and commitments and contextualize them in teachers' and programs leaders' voices. I conclude with recommendation for future research and potential policy implications for teacher preparation.

2. Teacher careers and the problem of early attrition

There is a wide consensus among researchers that high quality teaching has a substantial positive effect on student learning outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Rice, 2003; Rockoff, 2004; Sanders, Saxton, & Horn, 1997). Though there are contrasting interpretations to what "highly qualified" means, most teacher educators will agree that mastering the subject matter, having the skills to teach it, and receiving some form of guidance, while teaching (during preparation and beginning stages of teaching) are all critical components for developing the knowledge, dispositions and skills of a highly qualified teacher. Preparing such high quality teachers for long-term careers has been a constant challenge in the last three decades, especially, since growing number of talented women left the profession for better paying jobs with higher prestige and improved working conditions (e.g., Condliffe-Lagemann, 2000; Sedlak & Schlossman, 1986).

2.1. Teacher retention in public and urban public schools

Interestingly, recruiting enough new teachers has not been the main problem, but it has rather been the tendency of those who get in to leave quickly (and in big numbers) that plagued the system (Ingersoll, 2001). Johnson and The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers (2004) argue that this phenomenon is grounded in a larger trend of flexible job transitions of professionals and development of multiple careers. Thus, they argue, teachers of

today are increasingly entering the profession with no long-term career commitment in mind. Instead, they view teaching as one of several other jobs they will take on during their career. The most recent data shows that in 2004/5 alone, public and private schools lost 8.4% and 13.6%, respectively, of their teachers (Marvel, Lyter, Peltola, Strizek, & Morton, 2007, p. 7). According to the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (2003) 33% of all new teachers who enter the system leave within the first three years and around 50% leave within five years (in most urban districts the rate of attrition tend to be higher).¹

Exacerbating this problem further is the fact that many of those who stay in teaching move frequently between schools looking for improved working conditions (8.1% of the teachers moved from their public school and 5.9% moved from their private school) (Marvel et al., 2007, p. 7). Urban public schools in the U.S., which often serve poor minorities, those with the greatest need for high quality teachers, are also the schools which suffer the most from these two problems, and as a result have every year disproportionately more teachers moving out (10.3%), usually to more affluent schools with better working conditions, and more teachers who leave the profession all together (9.9%) (p. 9). Also illustrative of the urban public schools' dire condition is the fact that only 6% of the teachers surveyed on the National School and Staffing Survey (NSSS) said they would like to teach at an urban school. Most distressing, however, is the fact that the more able and educated teachers, those who can find and move most easily to the better paying jobs, are also those who are more likely to leave schools (e.g., Roberson, Keith, & Page, 1983), and in particular urban schools, (Henke et al., 2000) exacerbating the problem of teacher retention even more (Ingersoll, 2001).

The implications of teacher attrition are dismal:

Teachers turnover brings significant financial costs, up to \$8000 for each teacher who leaves the profession (Ingersoll, 2003) and as much as 329 million to 2.9 billion dollars annually for just one U.S. state (Texas State Board for Educator Certification, 2000). Further, others suggest that teacher turnover impacts the effectiveness of the school overall (Bridge, Cunningham, & Frsbach, 1978), student development and attainment, and the morale of those who stay (Macdonald, 1999). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, teacher effectiveness grows over the first few years of teaching (Ferguson, 1991, Murnane & Phillips, 1981). Thus teacher turnover that results in inexperienced teaching force reduces educational quality for students (Grissmer, Flanagan, Kawata, & Williamson, 2000). (Rinke, 2008, p. 2)

2.2. Catholic schools and teacher attrition

Catholic schools have suffered from teacher attrition even more than their counterparts in the public school system. The problem of teacher attrition in Catholic schools today is at least partly rooted in the decline of their traditional religious workforce (which consisted primarily of nuns). In the last few decades, as less women chose to become nuns, Catholic schools and the Catholic establishment have been forced to adjust and consider new recruitment and teacher preparation strategies that focus primarily at hiring "lay teachers". Cook and Engel (2006) summarize the current reality in U.S. Catholic schools. They note that,

¹ For example, a recent Research For Action Report (Useem, Offenber, & Farley, 2007) that tracked beginning teachers in the Philadelphia public school district reveals that after 6 years, 70% left the district and additional 16% moved from their original school to another school in the district.

The teacher attrition problem is magnified for America's Catholic schools. Public schools lure away Catholic school teachers with higher salaries and better benefits. After the 1999–2000 school year, private schools – including Catholic schools – turned over 21% of their teachers while public schools turned over 15% of their teachers (Provasnik & Dorfman, 2005). Data for Catholic schools estimate that 50% of the teachers hired by Catholic schools in the United States had left their jobs within five years (Przygocki, 2004). (p. 2)

2.3. Jewish day schools and teacher attrition

Jewish day schools differ from both urban public and most Catholic schools, as they cater predominantly to middle class urban and suburban Jews. Nevertheless, these schools too find it hard to compete with public schools in the suburbs, in terms of salary and benefits and, as a result, are faced with a constant challenge to recruit and retain high-quality professional teachers (Ben-Avie & Kress, 2008; Gamoran, Goldring, Robinson, Tammivaara, & Goodman, 1998; Schaap & Goodman, 2001). Referring to one indicator of teacher quality for those teaching in Jewish Day Schools, Ben-Avie and Kress (2008) found that roughly half “did not hold valid teaching credentials”. In the concluding remarks of their recent report, Ben-Avie and Kress noted that,

EJSS [Educators in Jewish Schools Study] also surfaced the real possibility of a looming teacher shortage overall on the educational horizon. Data revealed that 40%–46% of teachers in both day and complementary schools were 50-years-old or older. Compounding this issue is the reality that younger teachers tended to be less certain that they would stay in the field of Jewish education than older teachers. In fact, less than half (48%) of teachers younger than 30-years-old responded “yes” to the statement, “I envision spending the rest of my career in Jewish education.” This “graying” of the educators in Jewish schools reflects the national demographic in education and raises the likelihood that the Jewish educator population (fully qualified or not) will diminish over the next two decades. (p. 36)

In this grim reality of “revolving doors,” of “graying and diminishing” teaching cadres, of good intentions, and little stability and quality, children's capacity to learn effectively is restricted, especially as studies show that in order to become effective, teachers need to stay in the classroom for several years while receiving meaningful induction support (Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

2.4. Why do beginning teachers stay or leave teaching?

There is a wide literature on why teachers stay or leave teaching during their first years in teaching.² Lortie (1975) and Cohn and Kottkamp (1993) showed the persistent and important role of intrinsic rewards³ for teachers' satisfaction. For example, in both of these studies more than 85% of the teachers who were surveyed felt rewarded when they “knew that [they] have ‘reached’ students and they have learned” (Lortie, 1975, p. 105). Many scholars contend that school environment and culture are a major factor in shaping teachers' decision too. Johnson & The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers (2004) argue that teachers are looking for a hospitable, supportive, collaborative, challenging, and stimulating

work environment, where they can grow, assume responsibility as teacher leaders and administrators, and feel respected. The teachers of today are not going to settle for less, they argue, and this seems to be particularly true for the most talented teachers in hard-to-staff schools, who can easily leave for more lucrative jobs (e.g., Henke et al., 2000; Roberson et al., 1983).

Research show that when schools develop and maintain support systems for beginning teachers that include serious mentoring and induction that are oriented on improving teachers' practice, teachers are more likely to stay in their school and are less likely to move to other schools or leave teaching (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). There is also a wide consensus among educators that strong vibrant professional teacher communities of teachers and administration support are nothing but essential for beginning teachers to develop and thrive (e.g., Johnson & The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers, 2004; Louis, Kruse, & Marks, 1996; McLaughlin, 1993; Tamir, 2009d).

Yet, while school related variables have critical effect on teachers' satisfaction, motivation, and likelihood to stay in teaching, move to other schools, or leave teaching, beginning teachers' decisions may also be affected and shaped by their teacher preparation experience and the interaction of this experience with teachers' intrinsic rewards. In fact, this paper seeks to focus particularly on this potentially important link between teacher preparation experience and teachers' conceptions of their career commitments. However, before I move to discuss this issue I would like to briefly consider one possible critique to this line of inquiry, which might argue that any attempt to improve educational inequality by enhancing teacher quality⁴ is likely to fail, if the basic causes of that inequality are not addressed (i.e. the growing economic inequality).

2.5. What role can education reform play in the presence of social inequality

It is important to note that high teacher attrition in urban schools is considered by some to be primarily a symptom of a larger socio-political problem related to educational, economic, and racial inequities, which are prevalent in most societies, but are particularly rampant in the U.S.⁵ From this perspective, any attempt to solve urban education problems needs to be addressed within a comprehensive framework that deals with the structural economic inequality that deprives poor urban families the opportunity to live decent meaningful life and provide quality education to their children. This contention is backed by abundance of sociological research showing that opportunities for quality education are highly determined by family background (student's socio-economic status), as partially reflected in parents' economic wealth, education, and occupation.⁶

Nevertheless, many researchers (e.g., Grissmer et al., 2000) argue that while socio-economic status remains a powerful factor, “both the level of expenditure per pupil and, more importantly, its

⁴ In this paper we basically argue that some forms of teacher preparation (context specific teacher preparation) can have positive impact on teacher quality.

⁵ These inequities are apparent across the board. First, school funding per capita differs greatly between rich northeastern and western states (e.g., New Jersey and California) and their counterparts in poor southern states (e.g., Louisiana, Mississippi). Second, in most states, despite years of intervention by courts, there are still vast inequities in resource allocation between large urban school districts, which generally serve unprivileged Afro-American and Latino minorities, and white suburban middle class communities.

⁶ For a comprehensive review of the literature and a forecast for the 21st Century, see: Gamoran, (2001). American Schooling and Educational Inequality: A Forecast for the 21st Century. *Sociology of Education* 74 (extra issue), pp. 135–153. Retrieved March 8, 2009, from <http://itp.wceruw.org/gamoran%20forecast.pdf>.

² For a recent review of this literature, see Rinke (2008).

³ Intrinsic rewards “... consist entirely of subjective valuations made in the course of work engagement; their subjectivity means that they can vary from person to person. But they are also constrained by the nature of the occupation and its tasks... (Lortie, 1975, p. 101).

allocation affected student achievement – particularly for states with disproportionately higher numbers of minority and less advantaged students” (p. xxiii–xxiv). In other words, such findings support many in the educational community who argue that while targeted education reforms can not solve the deep endemic problem of social inequality, they can help partially remediate and improve particular aspects within the educational system that ultimately might narrow social inequality (e.g., by improving basic skills in math, science and reading among minorities and working class students). Also, along these lines, and in response to what we know about young unprepared teachers being placed in hard-to-staff schools without proper support, many teacher educators, some of which play key roles in the programs that we study in this paper, argue that establishing teacher preparation programs that are relevant and try to address real needs in schools are also better positioned to provide rich, meaningful preparation that is connected to particular school contexts. Such preparation, they would argue, can help beginning teachers become more effective and as a result contribute to teacher retention, teacher quality, school change, and student achievements.

2.6. *The potential impact of context specific teacher education*

Research on the effects of teacher preparation on teacher quality, teacher retention, and student outcomes has been incomplete, inconsistent (Wilson, Floden & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001) and subject to a heated debate in the U.S. on issues related to program's content, structure, and governance. While this debate has evolved primarily between proponents of traditional university based teacher preparation and advocates of alternative teacher certification programs, some scholars argue that the content, structure and focus of these programs varies significantly (Humphrey & Wechsler, 2007) and is more important than who governs them (e.g., university ed schools, non-profit organizations, states, districts, or cities).⁷

I support the assertion above and thus call for further focus on research that would seek to uncover the ways in which teacher preparation programs positively affect their graduates. Programs' ideas, mission, and explicit approaches and strategies to teaching, I argue, shape teachers' career commitments. More specifically, this paper explores whether particular forms of teacher preparation might counter teacher attrition and buttress retention trends by preparing committed beginning teachers that would stay in teaching at the places they are needed the most.

In previous work, I referred to this question, when I studied the reasons that motivate students in selective colleges to join teacher education programs and pursue teaching careers in urban schools (Tamir, 2009a). One case, to which I refer in my work, as being crucial for understanding the potential impact of context specific teacher education programs, is Center X, at the University of California, Los Angeles. Center X puts a strong emphasis on preparing teachers who understand the social context of urban poverty and are committed to empower poor students to challenge inequities. According to Quartz and The TEP Research Group (2003), over 90% of Center X teachers reported having a strong belief in social justice. In addition, the program prepares teachers to be reflective practitioners, who understand the socio-political history of their schools, neighborhoods and city and are acquainted with the culture of the communities they serve. Teacher preparation includes intensive internship and mentoring in the same

schools they are expected to join after graduation. This focused preparation, Quartz et al. argue, contributed to Center X's high retention rates. Indeed, Center X teachers are far more likely to stay in urban teaching or develop leadership careers in urban schools, when compared to national statistics data. After 5 years, 70% of Center X's graduates continued to work as teachers compared to a national average of 50%. In fact, these teachers do even better, in terms of retention, when those who moved to other jobs, but stayed in urban education, are included (88%) (Quartz and The TEP Research Group, 2003).

Center X is just one case. This paper aims to study more programs that are similar in terms of their commitment to particular school sector and community, and explore whether they are preparing teachers who are likely to pursue careers in teaching and educational leadership. Since the programs that we study are younger than Center X, our inquiry hopes to uncover how beginning teachers conceptualize their careers choices and their reasons for staying in or leaving the profession. In addition, we consider through a comparative lens what role context specific teacher education programs play in shaping the career trajectory of their graduates and helping them develop a conception of teaching driven by ideological/religious mission to make society better.

3. The “Choosing to Teach” study

To address these issues, the Choosing to Teach study examined three programs – University Teacher Education Program (UTEP), Day School Leadership Through Teaching (DeLeT), and Alliance for Catholic Education (ACE) – that aim to prepare teachers for specific contexts – we call them “context-specific” teacher education programs. These three programs are designed around a particular type of schools (urban – public, urban – Catholic, and Jewish) with a focus on particular (not generic) students. These programs also work diligently to help prospective teachers adopt specific tools and strategies that are viewed as necessary for teaching effectively in that context, as well as a conception of the purposes of education that would best serve students within that context.

Launched in 2003 at the University of Chicago, UTEP (University Teacher Education Program) prepares 20 teachers annually to serve poor urban minorities in Chicago public schools. Founded in 2002 at Brandeis University outside Boston and Hebrew Union College in Los Angeles, DeLeT (Day School Leadership Through Teaching) prepares 15–20 teachers annually for Jewish day schools. Established in 1994 at the University of Notre Dame, ACE (Alliance for Catholic Education) prepares approximately 200 teachers a year to serve primarily poor urban minorities in Catholic urban schools in the southern United States.

Below, I first provide a brief description of the programs' histories, missions, structures, and educational agendas. Second, I describe the research method and procedures.

3.1. *The three programs*

UTEP was founded in 2003, to prepare teachers to teach in under-resourced urban public schools, which serve primarily poor black and Latino students. It is a 14 month (including a year long undergraduate course) Masters program, which started operating on a small scale, preparing 10 primary teachers annually, but is now gradually expanding. The program's curriculum emphasizes notions of social justice and students' empowerment, as well as learning theory and balanced literacy. Prospective teachers in the program are expected to embody these notions, skills and dispositions that they develop through their preparation, in order to become successful urban teachers.

⁷ For background on the history and politics of alternative teacher certification programs see Tamir's (2008, 2009b) work on New Jersey's pioneering alternate route program and the political debate that surrounded it during the 1980s.

DeLeT was founded in 2002 as a national post-baccalaureate program (which later transformed to a 14 month Masters program at Brandeis). It was designed to provide rigorous preparation leading to state certification for individuals who aspire to become Jewish day school teachers. In this study, we focused on the Brandeis site, which prepares 10 teachers annually. The year-long preparation is designed to allow teachers to develop the skills of planning, reflecting, and being ongoing learning practitioners, who know how and aspire to infuse Jewish values in their teaching of Judaic and/or general studies.

Established in 1994, ACE is the biggest program in this study, preparing 200 teachers annually in a two years Masters program. Teachers start the program with a summer semester that is focused on getting them acquainted with basic teaching skills such as managing their classrooms, and with the Catholic schools they would be sent to serve. The program tries to push prospective teachers to consider and tie together spirituality and teaching, Catholic values of serving the poor and making the world a better place, with teaching in poor urban Catholic schools. At the end of the first summer, teachers are sent to Catholic schools primarily in southern U.S. and assume positions as teachers of record. In each location, teachers live together and form communities, which intend to provide spiritual and professional support. In addition, throughout their preparation, teachers remain in contact with a program faculty advisor, participate in online courses, take part in program retreats and activities, and acquire a state certification.

3.2. Method

Researchers conducted semi-structured, open-ended interviews with 30 randomly selected new teachers drawn equally from the three programs. Teachers were asked to discuss why they joined their programs, what were they hoping to achieve by that in their life in general and professional life in particular, and what would they see themselves doing in the future (for a list of questions, see interview protocol with teachers – Appendix A). Subjects were first or second year teachers in schools served by their programs. In addition, the author conducted semi-structured interviews with the three program directors to learn about their perception of their programs and teachers (see interview protocol with program directors – Appendix B). All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. We also collected documents describing programs' curriculum and mission.

Data analysis involved writing thematic summaries and developing a coding scheme that was generated in accordance to the literature on teacher attrition and career that was reviewed in this paper. Using the qualitative software ATLAS.ti, we applied the coding scheme to the transcripts and developed a series of analytic grids to highlight themes, patterns, and discrepant data.

This paper coded teachers' and directors' responses by program as they apply for two related aspects; first, teachers' career aspirations in general, and second, the number of years teachers anticipated staying in the classroom (same aspects were coded in programs' directors interviews). For example, a list of codes was developed and applied to describe how many years each teacher considers staying in teaching (e.g., one year, two years, less than five years, more than five years). In addition, a list of codes was compiled from teacher responses to describe the kinds of careers they were hoping to pursue, like "teaching is my long-term career," "I would like to become a mentor/counselor," "my long-term goal is to become a school administrator/principal," "I like to become a state senator to promote urban education reform." Whenever possible, after collecting multiple responses from each teacher, one inclusive code was assigned to reflect the teacher's standpoint. In the rare cases when responses were not coherent or when a teacher

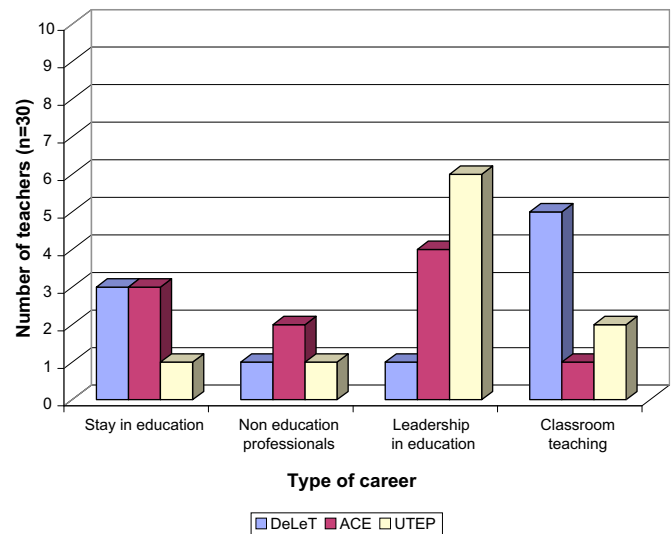


Fig. 1. Teachers' career aspirations by program.

said she is not sure about her future, I coded her response as "unclear."

4. Beginning teachers' career aspirations

As can be seen in Fig. 1, eight teachers in total (five from DeLeT, two from UTEP, and one from ACE) anticipated developing a long-term career as classroom teachers. Eleven teachers said they would expect holding educational leadership positions outside the classrooms (mostly as administrators and principals). Interestingly, administration leadership was seen as a popular career choice particularly among ACE and UTEP teachers. Comparatively, among DeLeT teachers, only one teacher anticipated becoming an administrator leader. It is important to note that there is a sub-category of teacher leaders, which is not reflected in the figure below. A majority among DeLeT and UTEP teachers hoped to become teacher leaders⁸ in their school for the long term, or as a stage before seeking administration positions. I plan to address these significant differences among the programs in the discussion that follows.

Fig. 2 complicates the picture further. Consistent with Fig. 1, it seems that among the three programs, DeLeT's teachers articulated the most serious long-term commitment to teaching. Of the DeLeT teachers, nine said they would stay in teaching more than five years. ACE teachers represent the mirror image of DeLeT with only four teachers planning to spend more than five years in the classroom. The UTEP teachers expressed almost the same commitment to classroom teaching as the DeLeT teachers, with nine teachers who said they would stay more than five years in teaching (nevertheless, only two UTEP teachers, compared with four from DeLeT, said that "teaching is my career").

When assessing the career aspirations of teachers from the three programs, an important aspect is whether teachers considered teaching in schools that cater to populations or communities that differ from those they were prepared to teach in. This question is particularly important, since the teachers we interviewed were all prepared to teach in schools that on average suffer from high attrition rates. As can be seen in Fig. 3, almost a third of the teachers

⁸ A role that allows teachers to take on, in addition to their own teaching, professional responsibilities, like mentoring of beginning teachers or becoming a curriculum specialist in their school.

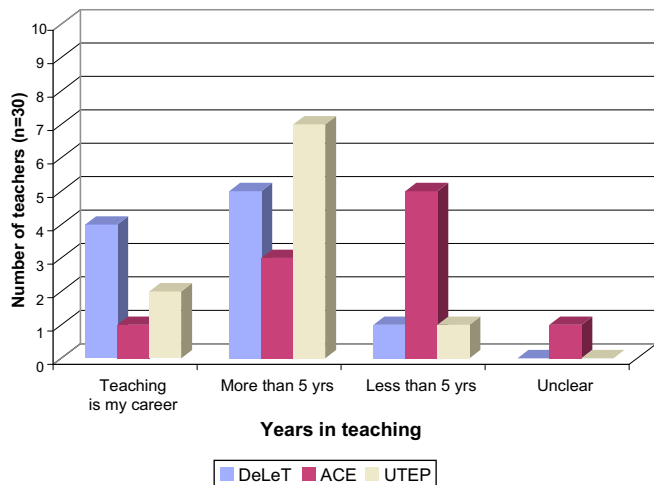


Fig. 2. Teachers' anticipated number of years in teaching by program.

(nine) said they might consider at some point moving to teach in suburban schools (which on average offer better salaries and benefits). Nine additional teachers were unsure and did not rule out the possibility that they might move to teach in suburban schools. The rest, 12 teachers, said that under no circumstances would they consider moving to another school context. The distribution of teachers by program affiliation along these three categories is also revealing. The DeLeT teachers who expressed the highest career commitment for teaching were also the most open to consider teaching in non-Jewish schools. Among the nine teachers who said they would consider teaching in other schools, six were DeLeT teachers. ACE and UTEP teachers were almost identical in their opposition to teach outside of their school sectors. Only one ACE and two UTEP teachers considered moving to another school sector, and additional four ACE and three UTEP teachers did not rule the idea out.

5. Program directors' perspective of their teachers' career

Programs, especially small and coherent ones, can send strong formal and informal messages to their students not only about preferable teaching strategies, but also about the kind of careers they expect them to pursue. I also like to propose that in such tight programmatic context, where faculty instructors and directors work closely and share a relatively coherent vision of their

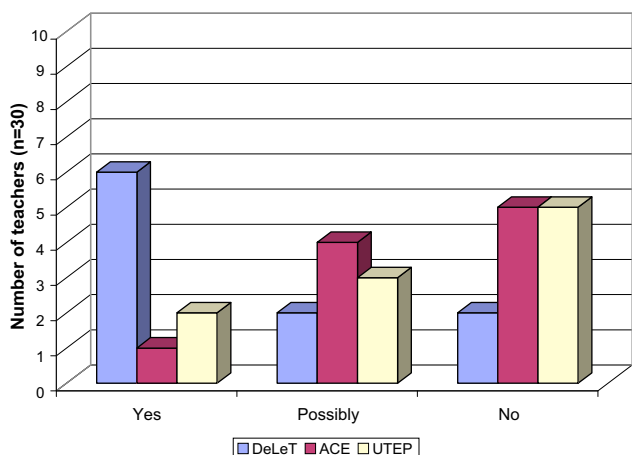


Fig. 3. Will teachers consider teaching in other school context?.

Table 1 Program directors' career expectations.

	Jewish Program	Catholic Program (for teachers staying in education)	Urban Public Program
1–5 y	Teachers	Teachers, Teacher leaders, or administrators	Teachers
5–10 y	Teacher leaders	Administrators	Teacher leaders
10–20 y	Teacher leaders	Administrators	Administrators

program, it might be easier for prospective teachers to understand the kinds of careers and commitments their programs expect them to pursue and adopt.

The interview with the three program directors was aimed at capturing their perspective of the kinds of careers and commitments they hope their graduates will pursue and the duration of time they wish their graduates will stay in the classroom before moving to another role or career.

Consistent with their programs' somewhat different aims and visions, the three program directors expressed different hopes regarding to their graduates' careers (see Table 1 for a summary of program directors' responses). The DeLeT director explained that she would be pleased if her graduates served at least 5–10 years as Jewish Day School teachers. The UTEP director was hoping to see her graduates teaching in urban schools for 10 years. The ACE director, reflecting the different agenda of his program, said he would like his graduates to complete their two years of teaching service and then pursue whichever career they desire, while continuing to care for and support Catholic schools. He noted that,

...the formal mission of the ACE program is to sustain and strengthen Catholic schools. That's our formal mission. The ACE program sees itself as providing faith-based teachers to Catholic schools in a variety of under resourced settings. ...To say that we wish to form teachers, who are committed to the profession... would not be correct. We know that many of our people, many of our applicants coming in are going to pursue law, medicine, Ph.D. programs, business, whatever. That's their intention from the day they walk in the doors. (Interview with ACE director, 2007)

All directors said they would hope their teachers would gradually take on teacher leadership positions (DeLeT and UTEP directors emphasized this leadership path in particular, but added that in the long run they would not feel bad if their graduates decide to pursue principalship or other senior administration positions). ACE director emphasized the importance of moving relatively early from teaching to school administration and principalship. All three directors were clear and firm about their expectations that teachers pursue teaching positions in Jewish Day Schools (not Jewish day cares, Sunday schools, or suburban public schools), Catholic schools (not public schools), and urban schools (not suburban schools). The following response of DeLeT director to the question, "will you consider it a success if your graduates teach in a Jewish Sunday school," articulates her perspective about DeLeT's mission.

That's not entirely a success. Because our mission is to build and strengthen the field of Jewish day school teaching. So, it's not that we don't appreciate other forms of Jewish education, we do. It's just that this program has a specific purpose and is very generously funded to address that purpose. As you know, we invest a great deal of financial resources to attract and prepare Jewish day school teachers who will become teacher leaders and influence the culture of day schools in powerful ways. So when graduates leave us to work in other areas of Jewish education it's hard to say "we've failed" but we do need to say we didn't fulfill the purpose we set out to do. Somebody just left now, from this last cohort and she's teaching at a preschool, which was what she

did before she came here. I adore her... I just feel very warmly about her, and maybe she's a better preschool teacher after being with us, and she may teach in a day school later in her career, but in the meantime, it's hard to call that a true success story. (Interview with DeLeT director, 2007)

In sum, all three programs seem to care deeply about the future of the school sectors they serve. DeLeT and UTEP believe that their mission of support should be limited to the preparation of high quality teachers. The ACE's formal mission is broader; it believes in preparing teachers to serve two years, and then become life-long advocates of Catholic Schools. It should be noted, however, that according to ACE's director, the program accepts three groups of students: a) students who are interested in doing a short service for the Catholic community and then hope to pursue a career in business, medicine, or law; b) students who are unclear about their future career and would like to explore teaching either as a service or profession, and; c) students who want to pursue a professional career in Catholic education. Previous research seems to partially support this categorization, showing that in cohorts graduating between 1998 and 2005, substantial part of ACE alums (56%) decided to stay in teaching for periods longer than two years (see: Bennet, 2006).

6. Comparing teachers' anticipated careers with national teaching force data

The three programs, which are the focus of this study, do not operate in isolation and should be considered in light of recent trends in the teaching force. In other words, the question of whether the findings presented so far may suggest of a positive trend needs to be addressed through a comparative lens which takes the data from our programs and compare it to National statistics. As can be seen below, Fig. 4 compares retention rates among three sets of data; 1. the three Choosing To Teach programs, 2. University of California Los Angeles, Center X (as mentioned earlier, Center X fits our definition of context specific teacher education program), and 3. the Schools And Staffing Survey (SASS) which collects a representative sample of U.S. teachers to assess (among many other variables) national rates of teacher retention.

Overall, as can be seen, both our programs and Center X, share similar high retention rates compared to the national average. After two years all teachers from context specific programs⁹ remained in their classrooms, compared with only 76% nationally. After five years, 25% percent of the context specific programs' teachers moved out of their classrooms compare to almost 50% of the teachers in the national sample (e.g., National Commission on Teaching for America's Future, 2003).¹⁰ However, when we include the number of teachers who move after 5 years to other educational roles in their respective sectors, which mainly refers to teachers who move to administrative positions, the retention rates for context specific teacher education programs leap to 90%.

These findings suggest that Context specific teacher education seem to have positive effect on the likelihood of teachers to stay in

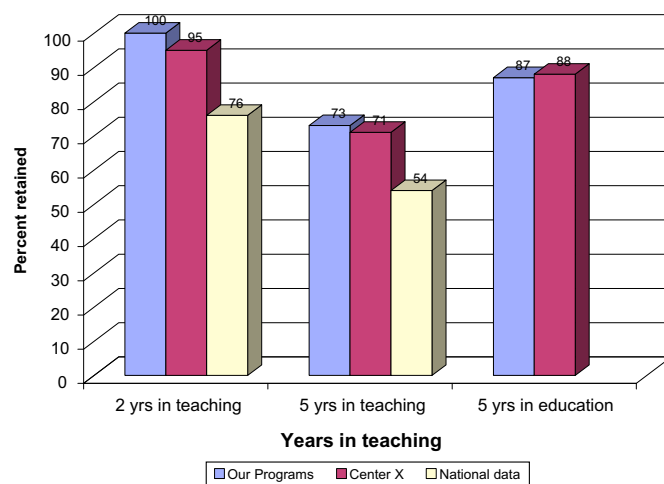


Fig. 4. Comparison of context specific teacher education programs and national retention trends.

their classrooms and to move into administrative positions in their respective fields.

7. Context specific teacher education and teacher retention

Why are most of the teachers in our sample convinced they would stay in their classrooms and develop meaningful careers in teaching? Why are most of them convinced they would continue teaching in under-resourced schools, which pay poorly (Jewish Day Schools are rarely under-resourced, but they pay teachers significantly less than most public schools), despite being graduates of elite colleges who usually enjoy favorable access to lucrative jobs with far better pay and benefits. It is clear, that trying to suggest a simple answer that spans across our diverse sample of programs and teachers will not be an easy task.

Yet, in this section I try to sum up what I learned from teachers, program directors, and program curriculum. The data suggest some interesting links between context specific teacher education, the intrinsic rewards that motivated our teachers, and teacher retention. In particular, I focus on the ideological/religious conceptions of teaching and society related to each program and how teachers articulated their perspectives as they were trying to engage with the ideas that were promoted by their programs. I hypothesize that developing a long-term career commitment to teach specific groups of students in particular school contexts goes hand in hand with deeply caring about a social/religious cause (e.g., social justice, Jewish continuity) which is connected to students and particular school sectors. I intend to show how these notions, although being articulated in a different way across programs, have been core themes in teachers' and program directors' voices.

7.1. The urban public program – a path to leadership through social justice and pedagogy

The UTEP's website lays out its perspective of the kind of teachers they recruit and prepare:

[UTE] students are bright and hardworking, thoughtful, persistent, and committed to social justice through education. Students applying to [UTE] are interested in becoming the best classroom teachers in urban schools. They see themselves growing into the next generation of teacher leaders in CPS

⁹ It's important to note again that for the 30 beginning teachers in our sample we are presenting only their anticipated professional careers, while for Center X, we are presenting actual data.

¹⁰ As noted earlier, these national attrition statistics represent just the average trend. National data for teachers in urban schools or at schools which cater students with high poverty rates reveal a grimmer picture. We also know that among teachers who teach in urban schools and hold advanced and superior college education, like the teachers in our sample, attrition after five year is higher, as most of these teachers have competing job offers which provide better pay/prestige than teaching.

[Chicago Public Schools] and other urban districts like it around the country. (UTEP website)¹¹

As a result, UTEP focuses its recruitment on individuals who are already committed to social justice and are interested to further it through teaching. According to UTEP's director:

there's a lot of work that goes in on teacher identity in the soul strand, but I actually think that we do some heavy duty screening on the front end of the program so... when we take people into our program, they need to be able to talk about more than just their commitment to teaching. They have to talk about their interest in urban teaching to begin with, and they also have to talk about social justice, and sort of what they see as the relationship between social justice and their teaching. (Interview with UTEP director, 2007)

This statement is important, since it conveys an assumed connection between being able to teach successfully in urban schools and having a strong elaborated commitment to social justice. All UTEP teachers that we spoke with shared this view (Tamir, 2009a). They believed there is a great need for talented young teachers in urban schools that serve poor and minority students. When asked about her preference for a job placement, one of the teachers explained,

I think that if I am going to be teaching, I am going to be teaching in an urban school with disadvantaged children... I feel like that is where the need is and that is where... I feel... I can do the most... make the biggest difference... Those are the kids that... really need somebody who cares about them (SMK14_U, 81:31)

Another teacher was even more explicit about the importance of social justice to her decision to become an urban teacher.

My commitment to social justice [is] feeling like I need to be the change, [like] the [UTEP] slogan... be the change you want to see in the world... and that was one factor... What really cemented my decision was... a field visit in Winnetka, which is like a super wealthy suburb, and then we... had done one [visit] in like one of the poorest areas in Chicago...seeing the contrast... made me... feeling very angry... and so just frustrated, [with] the fact that there are equally talented children and in one community their talents are allowed to flourish and in another community... they're being squashed. And so it was really at that point too where I was like I really want to do urban teaching and no other kind... I feel there's a joy... you get in the urban setting, and it's so hard to explain, but just the kids keep you on your toes and the questions they ask, they're not afraid to ask... it's just a different ballgame and I would not teach anywhere else. (SMK17_U, 84:20)

This teacher's reaction of becoming angry in the face of ineffable gap of resources between two neighboring schools echoes a rather similar feeling expressed by a Center X teacher named Cicely, who chose to teach in one of L.A. public schools (Quartz and The TEP Research Group, 2003).

Cicely grew up not far from the urban school where she now teaches. During her first year student-teaching, she was robbed at gunpoint—a terrifying incident that clarified what she calls “a mission to help children see the range of possibilities for their lives so that they don't see crime or this type of behavior as their only option.” ...Still living in the community and buying her groceries alongside her students' parents, Cicely is a deeply committed

social justice educator. The longer she teaches, the more opportunities she finds to make her school caring and just. She is always frustrated by conditions familiar to so many who work in urban schools—an unsupportive administration, inadequate facilities, too few community supports, and so on... Why does Cicely stay in teaching? She says she is “too angry to leave” (p. 99).

The anger and commitment for change that are expressed in each of these stories illuminate the resemblance between Center X and UTEP in terms of their mission and the kind of teachers they seek to prepare for urban schools.

Nevertheless, UTEP stresses that being committed to social justice is important but not sufficient. It is also crucial to prepare teachers how to teach in urban context. Indeed, UTEP director notes that,

...there's one thing about... being passionate about teaching and being in social justice, and then we talk about sort of how is that operationalized...? And I think... having the tools to operationalize those things in your practice actually helps affirm your identity, like I really think that if you have tools and you have strategies and then you can actually continue teaching in a particular manner, that... reinforce[s] your identity as an urban teacher. But that's just one part. The other part of it is addressing issues of inequity, and we talk about that specifically through achievement in the classroom. (Interview with UTEP director, 2007)

In other words, UTEP believes that it is essential for its teachers first, to learn how to teach urban students and second, to anchor this teaching in an ideological perspective that emphasizes social justice and equal opportunity.

In terms of teacher careers, the programs' goal is to “prepare students to become successful teachers – and eventually teacher leaders – in urban elementary schools” (UTEP website).¹² UTEP director helps unpack this statement in relations to issues of retention and career, and regarding to the program's expectations from its graduates,

We want our teachers to teach in urban schools and model in their classrooms the kind of practices that we have exposed them to in the program. And specifically, we're talking about... a particular kind of literacy instruction. We're talking about classrooms that have really strong classroom communities, classrooms that are sort of rigorous in their instruction. So it's not just a sole focus on academics... [but] that there's sort of attention to the whole child. And then we want these teachers to become a part of a professional community in a school, and then eventually become the leaders in those schools over time... And I don't mean administrators necessarily, but I mean...[for example] curriculum coordinators. Positions within the school that don't necessarily take them out of the classroom, but allow them to shape practice and inform practice in their schools. (Interview with UTEP director, 2007)

One issue that catches the eye is the expectation of UTEP director to see her graduates engage in long-term teacher leadership careers, while viewing early moves from teaching to educational administration as less desirable. When asked about this preference of hers, she notes,

In the last couple of years I think we've learned that we need to be careful about how we talk about teacher leadership because I think sometimes it's assumed that teacher leadership means principalship. And I think a lot of people also assume, including our

¹¹ Excerpt Retrieved on March 8, 2008, from: <http://utep.uchicago.edu/students/index.shtml>.

¹² <http://utep.uchicago.edu/>.

students sometimes, that what we're saying is teach for two years and then go on and do something else, for example, run a school. And so that's not out of the question, but I think what we're trying to say is that there are lots of opportunities that involve staying in the classroom and these teachers can also play role of leader simultaneously. (Interview with UTEP director, 2007)

Overall, the UTEP's beginning teachers in our sample tend to see their careers develop along similar (but not always identical) lines to those described by their program director. As we have reported elsewhere, their interest in teaching and leadership is intertwined.¹³ Seven of them said they are likely to teach at least five years and six said they would pursue teaching leadership, as well as educational administration in their schools, district, and one said she would seriously consider becoming an urban education advocate through state politics.

Consider for example, one of these teachers who articulated a similar career path to the one articulated by her program director.

I don't necessarily plan on staying a classroom teacher for my entire career. I'm definitely looking toward building up to being at least a coach, maybe even a principal, an instructional leader, to build a school where there's a community of learners and a professional community as well, where learning comes alive for all of the students (JLW12_U, 74:24).

Another teacher indicated his intention to use teaching as a stepping-stone for school administration;

I think my commitment is to change the school system as it is right now, at least the Chicago public school system, and you can't really do that unless you understand the situation of the teachers, of the students, and that's part of the reason why my goal is to teach for five years, to just gain that experience and in the future there's a possibility that I might try to move up and do some administrative stuff where I can be more effective in the school wide level (JLW08_U, 70:53).

Other teachers share the same passion to promote educational change, but were unsure which career path they would pursue to achieve that aim. One of these teachers notes,

I would want to stay in the field of education. I am interested also in the politics of the education system and trying to change that. If it means that I need to take another direction besides being in the classroom, then it is a possibility. But I am not sure (JLW09_U, 71:08).

A careful reading of these teachers' accounts reveals a desire for change and reform at the school and district level that is inspired by a deep commitment for social justice alongside a passion to practice teaching. Often, however, teachers felt that the two can't go hand in hand. Therefore, for many of them, making a decision to pursue leadership or teaching involved a self-reflection of where would they achieve most impact. The following example articulates nicely this tension between teaching and leadership that are inspired by a commitment to social justice:

I hope to be in education for the rest of my life... I'm not sure if that will always be classroom teaching. At the beginning of the year, it was more of a possibility than it is now... I've considered going into administration, because that's where I really see change in schools happening. It's like, yeah, I can make my classroom a happy, safe place for my kids, but then what happens when they go on to 6th grade? I see other teachers in

my school who don't teach at all like I do and... they're not preparing their kids the way that I want to prepare my kids. The greatest changes and impressive things I've seen in education were because of principals or people founding charter schools. That's definitely something I would consider to up the impact. (JLW13_U: 75:16).

7.2. *The Catholic program – teaching service for the poor and a commitment for leadership in Catholic schools*

ACE is a two-year service program that provides an opportunity of becoming involved as a teacher in the lives of a Catholic school and the community it serves. After a short initial preparation during the summer, ACE teachers are assigned a class and become teachers of record in Catholic schools, often located in urban settings. Thus, ACE teachers find themselves facing some similar challenges to those faced by UTEP teachers, but without the extensive preparation of the latter. As we have seen, many ACE teachers are looking for a short-term teaching service through which they could make the world a better place and contribute to the Catholic community. Interestingly, neither ACE teachers, nor their program director used even once the term “social justice.” Instead, when teachers discussed why they chose teaching and why teaching was important for them almost all of them used terms that articulated social action infused with a religious cause/mission, like “saving souls,” “helping the poor,” “doing service.” So for instance, some ACE teachers understood their service, as being particularly carried out for the poor.

...service of the poor, I think, for me that's very important, or those that are kind of less fortunate. ...I see that faith as an opportunity to serve others, and ACE really drives that point home, and I certainly believe in that. (SMK13_C, 80, 49)

Another teacher explained that,

On a theological, theoretical level, it's just the way to really save souls, I think. It gives people freedom, it advances our community, it advances our society, and those are all things that are really important to me. (JLW02_C, 64:27)

Many teachers were less explicit about the “social” character¹⁴ of their teaching and chose to emphasize the religious notions, which guided their teaching. One teacher noted, that

Being a teacher fits with my being Catholic in the sense of helping others and service to others as Jesus was a teacher and he taught others about his faith. Now I'm in the opportunity where I can do the same and teach others about my faith kind of in his image so to speak and also teach others about the world and what's going on and life. (JLW04_C, 66:45)

For some, teaching and service went so far as being a call.

Yeah, definitely, like the idea of service was big. Like, all my siblings had all done service after school and it was just kind of a – it wasn't looked upon as, like, a waste of a year or two years or a thinking period before you went on to do what you wanted to do. It was more looked upon as something that we were called to do and that we should do. (JLW03_C, 65:33)

ACE teachers articulate a rich religious and spiritual context that guided their actions and service. For them, doing good and helping the poor through a teaching service was seen as part of being good

¹³ For a detailed analysis of the reasons that draw UTEP and other elite college graduates to urban teaching, see: Tamir, 2009a.

¹⁴ While, I consider the notion of “service” in the context of ACE as one that entails a sizable component of contribution for society, the point I am trying to make here is that some teachers did not explicitly mention the “poor” or “minorities” as the populations they were hoping to serve.

Catholics. Moreover, these teachers' statements echo what seems to be ACE's formal mission, of providing "faith-based teachers to Catholic schools in a variety of under resourced settings" (Interview with ACE director).

As I have suggested before, ACE is not trying to promote teaching as a preferred professional career among its fellows and graduates. Instead, the program developed an alternative broad vision of leadership in Catholic education, which graduates are expected to pursue and accommodate within the constraints of their job, family, interests, and available time. Referring to this large fraction of ACE graduates who come to the program in order to pursue a short teaching service, ACE director noted:

We provide them with assistance and support in whatever ways we can to move in those directions, while at the same time challenging, insisting, urging them to be the best teacher they can possibly be during their two years in the program. But we never make any effort to change or sway them from what their career aspiration is. But what we would say is, to them as to everybody else, in whatever your capacity as you go forward in life we hope you will be committed to Catholic schools which we feel make a significant contribution to the educational endeavors of this country, so whatever that may be. It may be when you have children in school you will be school board members. You will offer your professional services. As a doctor, you will come in and teach a chemistry course, whatever it may be, but to support, sustain, and strengthen Catholic schools. Sometimes it takes a more formal form than that because we have an alumni group called the Fellowship which actually organizes people in various cities to adopt a school... and do things for a particular school. So there have been a number of different ways in which we've tried to advance that particular mission to those who have finished the program and who are pursuing other professional paths. (Interview with ACE director, 2007)

For those teachers who wished to stay beyond the two-year service period or were unsure about their future career paths, ACE articulated a more specific agenda that emphasized the importance of pursuing leadership positions in Catholic schools.

...our effort is to help [teachers] understand what it means to become a master teacher... we want them to become in that sense leaders in their schools both in the classroom and beyond the classroom depending upon what they would like to do. We would like them to do so in ways that continue to serve and that often invites them to do so in schools that are struggling. (Interview with ACE director, 2007)

When asked to further elaborate on the program's career expectations, ACE director articulated a vision of leadership that consisted of "five years of classroom teaching" to be followed by administrative service.

ACE teachers who were interested in pursuing careers in education seemed to have responded positively to these expectations and incorporated them in their own vision of leadership. For example, one teacher noted,

Being in the classroom is what I love. I like it but I think that also my tools can be used elsewhere so I'm going to put in that year three of teaching and then kind of see- feel out which one of these options I want to go, but I think I like the school structure and the school system enough and believe in it enough that I want to stay within it. ...being second year of teaching I am interested in administration. I have seen two different very-very different administrators, very poor administrators, and I'm a doer and a fixer and it's made me now want to go do and fix... (JLW04_C, 66:10).

Another teacher expressed his leadership aspiration even more explicitly,

My dream is to actually move into Catholic education administration. If you were to say, "Where do you want to be when you're 40?", I would say I really want to be the principal of a school, to just step up and be a leader. I feel like military school for me gave me some leadership skills that. I'm not ready yet, because I haven't taught long enough, but I want to be ready and I really want to fill that role as an administrator, in Catholic education (JLW02_C, 64:25).

When asked how long she plans on staying in teaching a third teacher responded:

Teaching, not sure. Education, probably for my entire career. At some point... I have aspirations of starting my own school down the road that's focused on... [the] ACE model (JWL07_C, 69:23).

Finally, partly as a result of ACE's structure and the short period it devotes for preparation, it is worth noting that most ACE teachers did not mention classroom pedagogy and/or specific teaching skills and strategies, as components that contributed to their success in class and led them to consider a career in teaching or educational leadership. ACE director expressed a different stance acknowledging the importance of pedagogy.

in doing that [i.e., preparing teachers] we feel that these teachers are both faith filled, inclined toward service, and would like to serve to the best of their ability, therefore need to know what that means professionally in order to be an effective teacher.

Overall, it seems that ACE has been trying to articulate what exactly "professionally" and "effective teacher" mean for the program and what it should mean in terms of skills and knowledge for their teachers. For now, it seems that those ACE teachers who pursue long-term career commitments are more likely to construct their interests around Catholic faith as they pertain to educational administration roles, rather than teaching leadership positions (where a clear capacity to articulate what a good and effective teaching means is required).

7.3. *The Jewish program – investing in Jewish continuity and creating a cadre of Jewish teacher leaders*

The DeLeT program has been preparing elementary day school teachers since 2002. In terms of structure, the program shares many similarities with UTEP. Teachers in DeLeT have a 14 month guided internship in schools, and go through a rigorous course program with an emphasis on how to teach Judaic and general studies in Jewish day schools. After completion of their program, many teachers are placed in Jewish day schools that have established relationships with DeLeT.

Unlike UTEP and ACE, which serve primarily under resourced urban schools with high rates of minority and disadvantaged students, DeLeT serves a middle class Jewish population. As a result of these stark differences, social justice has not been a prime reason for Jewish teachers to pursue a teaching career in Jewish day schools. Instead, Jewish teachers tend to conceptualize their decision to teach along two thematic lines that are tied to their Jewish beliefs; first, their desire to nurture children and help them grow, and second, the personal satisfaction, fulfillment, and happiness attached to teaching. These two themes are familiar from general education (e.g., *Lortie, 1975*), where they have been often used to describe why teachers choose a teaching career, but are relatively feeble among UTEP and ACE teachers. The question then is, if the

reasons that attracted individuals to become teachers in general and Jewish education seem to look more or less alike, what could still be pushing most DeLeT teachers to anticipate having long-term teaching careers in Jewish day schools? I argue that what might make these two general themes potentially powerful for Jewish education, in terms of career commitments and retention of teachers, is the way teachers are contextualizing them within their Jewish values, traditions, and desire to serve the greater cause of Jewish continuity.

Consider for example how the following teacher communicated her love for teaching children, the satisfaction it generated, and why it was important for her to do that in a Jewish day school:

one of my dreams that I've had for a while is to work... with older kids, like middle school, high school, as an English teacher... and really sparking that passion because that was my experience, and that's just been like the teachers I had and the way I was taught in those subjects made me love them and made me want to go in that direction. So if I can teach other kids in that way that's me, that's what I want to get out of it for myself, that's what I want to give, and to be able to do it in a Jewish setting feels good too, because that's, you know, something, that's part of my identity... so I want to teach kids to be all those Jewish values that I was talking about and to be Jews... but I also want to teach them to be readers and writers. (SMK1_J, 76:103)

Another DeLeT teacher was excited to be a teacher, since it allows her to explore how children think and how she can facilitate their development;

...I think that I am passionate about the cognitive scientist work... Francesca, who taught us in the summer, said one thing I will never forget. She said, "As a teacher, you are a cognitive scientist. You are studying how people think." So when a kid doesn't understand something that I am saying, because they do not understand one of the words that I have used, or... when a three-year-old boy that I nannied could pick out the shape of a Dreidel from a street sign, and he is not even Jewish, but he had me...I am amazed... He was three years old and he was always right. Anytime he said or observed, I would stop and just like ask more questions. ...And some people just ignore it because the kid is three years old. What does he have to tell you? (SMK4_J, 86:152–154).

This teacher felt that teaching in a Jewish day school was a way to give back to the Jewish community and as a result became "stronger" and more "confident" person.

I think that I had a lot of it, and I had a lot of - I was raised within it, immersed within a Jewish environment, a Jewish day school, a camp, everything that really shaped, that really gave me that strong identity. And I think I have always wanted to do the same for others, because I think it makes you a stronger person, or a more confident person (86:182).

Some teachers explicitly indicated that despite knowing they would be underpaid, they chose teaching in Jewish day schools, since it provided them the opportunity to fulfill themselves, "live by the Jewish calendar," and teach kids how to do that.

I guess my personal beliefs are that I want to be personally engaged in work that I find enjoyable, rewarding and fulfilling and not necessarily just making... the highest salary... It needs to be something that I'm feeling it's something useful... personal, religious... (SMK9_J, 90:20).

This teacher felt that teaching in a Jewish day school not only provided him personally the opportunity to live Jewish life more

fully, it also allowed him to engage his students in the life of the Jewish community.

I'm very excited by the fact that working in a Jewish day school I can live my life on the Jewish calendar the way that I did when I was living in Israel [where] the cultural things surrounding the calendar and the holidays, the food and whatever other traditions... [are part of] teaching the kids [and at same time are] part of their lives (90:30).

The above stories share much in common. They are told by Jewish day school teachers who teach, because it brings them joy, fulfillment, and opportunity to nurture children in a Jewish context. Many of them agree that much of their professional satisfaction is related to the fact that teaching in a Jewish context enables them to connect in meaningful ways to their religious/cultural community. These connections and links of teachers to their religious and profession carry great weight, especially when it comes to making career decisions. And indeed, when asked to envision how long they would stay in teaching, most Jewish teachers (eight) said they would teach for a significant period of time (more than five years).

Last, I would like to go back to our findings in Fig. 3, where we noted that Jewish teachers seemed the least bounded to their field, with half saying they might consider teaching in a non-Jewish school. While, at a first glance, this finding might raise concerns regarding to the presumed commitment of these teachers to Jewish day schools, I believe, that in the absence of any other supporting evidence, this finding should be interpreted cautiously.¹⁵ One explanation, for this phenomenon might argue that it reflects the spirit of inquiry and openness to new ideas that characterize many prospective Jewish teachers and is strongly supported by their program.

8. Conclusions

This study illuminates the potential impact of context-specific teacher education on teacher career choices. The strength of this type of teacher preparation lies in its ability to recruit and engage new teachers in a coherent mission and a set of values/ideas/beliefs concerning teaching, society and/or religious that the program promotes. Thus although the data we collected and analyzed are from the U.S., the phenomenon of context-specific teacher education and its potential policy implications is not limited to the U.S. alone.

As mentioned, teacher attrition has social, psychological, and economic implications on schools, students, teachers, and society at large (Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005). By studying a sample of teachers from three programs, which cater three different school sectors and communities, we tried to uncover models of teacher preparation that are able to recruit and prepare high quality teachers who are committed to teaching in school sectors that have been struggling for years to recruit and retain such teachers. In other words, we asked, not only, to what extent might these programs potentially alleviate the teacher attrition problem (or whether they continue to provide more of the same, that is, teachers who move into classes for a short while and then leave for more challenging, convenient, and rewarding jobs), but also what messages are these programs communicating, and what does it mean for beginning teachers to adopt a long-term commitment to their respective school sectors.

¹⁵ A comprehensive report that is based on a survey sent to all DeLeT alums in 2007 reveals that only one of 61 graduates moved from a Jewish day school to a public school (Tamir, 2009c).

Overall, although the data presented in this study support the assertion that context specific teacher education programs have positive impact on teachers' retention, the relationship between these variables requires further exploration through small scale qualitative and large-scale quantitative studies and at the moment remains inconclusive. In addition, this study provides a comparative rich outlook for understanding how beginning teachers who graduated from three distinct programs conceptualize their role as beginning teachers and develop career commitments to teaching, while responding to their programs' expectations.

We found that although programs vary, in term of their aims, and their approach to teacher preparation, they did share a similar mission and passion to support their respective schools and communities with high quality teachers. Yet, the programs interpreted this mission, differently. DeLeT and UTEP invested in a rigorous and relatively long preparation and expected their teachers to develop a long-term career commitment to teaching and teacher leadership. ACE provided an intensive summer-long preparation, and expected teachers to serve for two years in Catholic schools while receiving continuous spiritual and professional support. At the end of this two year period, teachers were encouraged to pursue teaching, educational administration, or any other professional choice and expected to actively support Catholic schools.

We also found noticeable differences among teachers in terms of what brought them to teaching, and how they understood their roles and goals as teachers that, in part, could be traced back to their program preparation. Most notably, we have shown that teachers in all three programs were driven by a strong sense of social and/or religious cause, which also strengthen their commitment to teaching, and school leadership at their respective school sectors. Indeed, most teachers, primarily at UTEP and DeLeT, anticipated staying in teaching and teacher leadership for a considerable period of time that is longer than the average teaching career (see Fig. 4). Some ACE and UTEP teachers also reported that they would likely seek administrative positions in the short or long run.

The patterns we have illustrated contain promising insights for policy makers in these three school sectors. It is suggested that context specific teacher education programs can prepare, support, and help beginning teachers understand and cope better with their future students, schools, and communities. In addition, these programs push novice teachers to think critically, take on more responsibility, and ultimately become more committed to teaching and leadership in their schools.

Last, it is important to emphasize that this study is just the first step. It allows us to explore patterns of teachers' perspectives concerning their decision to teach, to teach in a specific school context, and develop a long-term career commitment to their field, while considering these vis-à-vis the programs' structure and expectations. However, in order to provide more empirical clarity on these issues and processes, it is crucial to continue tracking teachers in other similar programs over time.¹⁶ For example, it will be fascinating to study how the relationship between context specific teacher education programs and their teachers change overtime, as teachers become more experienced and their professional needs evolve. How important is it for context specific teacher education program to continue supporting their teachers as many of these programs do at the earlier stages of teaching? What types of professional support should programs offer? and what should be

the goals of such support? Should this type of professional support be open to teachers who are not graduates of these programs? Another question we are currently exploring, looks at how the relationship of programs, schools and teacher communities, as a source of professional support, personal guidance and vision for teachers, evolves overtime (see: Tamir, 2009d).

Appendix A. Interview protocol

Decisions to teach

1. Why is teaching important to you?
2. Tell me about your decision to teach.
 - a. How did you arrive at this choice?
 - b. Have you ever considered other career directions, aside from teaching?
3. Is there something about your personal beliefs or values that influenced your decision to teach in urban public/urban Catholic/Jewish day schools?
4. Is there something about your religious beliefs that influenced your decision to teach?
5.
 - a. Catholic teachers: Did your being Catholic influence you in any way?
 - b. Jewish teachers: Did your being Jewish influence you in any way?
 - c. Urban public teachers and ALL: Did anything else influence you [draw on answer to Q1]

Possible Probes: childhood, childhood environment, own schooling, family

6. What did you hope to achieve by becoming a teacher?
7. What do you now hope to achieve by becoming a teacher?
8. How long do you think you'll stay in teaching?

Decisions to teach in Catholic, Jewish, and public urban schools

1. Tell me about your decision to teach in a Catholic/Jewish/Urban school.
2. Can you see yourself teaching in another kind of school? Please explain.

Teaching practice

1. What is your image of good teaching?
2. If I were to observe you in your classroom, what would I see you doing that fits your image of good teaching?
3. How does being a teacher fit with how you see yourself as a person?
 - a. Catholic teachers: How does being a teacher fit with your being Catholic?
 - b. Jewish teachers: How does being a teacher fit with your being Jewish?
 - c. Urban teachers: How does being a teacher fit with your commitments to social justice?

Teacher education

1. Did/Does your teacher education program have an image of good teaching in a Jewish day school/Catholic school/Urban school?
 - a. How would you describe that image?
 - b. How did you learn about that image in your program?
2. How does that image fit with your own vision of good teaching?

¹⁶ Unfortunately very few teacher preparation programs have been able to generate the interest and resources that are required to collect and maintain data and develop permanent research capacity that is needed to embark on a serious longitudinal study.

3. In what specific ways has the program influenced your classroom teaching?
4. In what specific ways has the program influenced your interactions with your students?
5. In what specific ways has the program influenced your interactions with the teachers in your school?
 - a. Who are your important colleagues?
6. In what specific ways has the program influenced your views of your students' parents and the community in which you teach?
7. In what ways has the program influenced your definition of yourself (or how you see yourself) as a teacher?
 - a. Can you be specific?
8. Jewish teachers: In what ways has the program influenced your sense of yourself as Jew?
Catholic teachers: In what ways has the program influenced your sense of yourself as a Catholic?
Urban teachers: In what ways has the program influenced your sense of yourself as someone teaching as a means of achieving social justice?
9. Did/Does the program's philosophy or mission fit with your own values and beliefs? In what ways? Are there ways in which it doesn't fit?
 - a. Jewish teachers: Did/Does the program's stance toward Judaism fit your own view of Judaism? In what ways does it fit? Are there ways in which it doesn't?
 - b. Catholic teachers: Did/Does the program's stance toward Catholicism fit your own view of Catholicism? In what ways does it fit? Are there ways in which it doesn't?
 - c. Urban teachers: Did/does the program stance toward social justice fit your own views?

School contexts

1. What is the image of good elementary school teaching promoted by your school?
 - a. How do you know?
2. In what ways does your school enable you to teach that way?
3. Does the school's image of good teaching fit with your image of good teaching??
4. Does the school's philosophy or mission fit with your own values or beliefs? How does the fit or lack of fit affect you?
 - a. Jewish teachers: Does the school's image of Judaism fit with yours? In what ways does the fit or lack of fit affect you as a Jew?
 - b. Catholic teachers: Does the school's image of Catholicism fit with yours? In what ways does the fit or lack of fit affect you as a Catholic?
 - c. Urban teachers: Does the school's image (the school you are currently placed in) of appropriate urban education fit with yours? How does the fit or lack of fit affect you?
5. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me or any questions I can answer for you?

Appendix B. Program directors and core faculty interview protocol

Vision of good teaching

1. We're interested in understanding better the kind of teaching you are trying to foster.
 - a. Who on your staff can best articulate this vision of good teaching?

- b. Is there something in writing that describes this kind of teaching?
- c. Where in the program do students encounter this vision of good teaching? How do you help students get inside this vision of good teaching?

Where if at all do students see this kind of teaching practiced? Where do they work the knowledge and skills to teach in this way?
How do you assess their learning?

2. Who else should we talk to about the program's vision of good teaching, where students learn about it and where they learn to enact it?

Context

3. In part, this is a study of "context-specific" teacher education. So one thing we would like to know is how ACE/UTEP/DeLeT defines the school context it is preparing students to teach in?
4. Where in the program do students learn about this context?
5. Are there specific courses or seminars where this is focal? Where do teachers learn
 - a. About the students?
 - b. About their families? their communities?
 - c. About teaching in this kind of school?
 - d. About the challenges of teaching in this kind of school?
6. Who is the best person to talk about how the field placements (including internship) work and contribute to this goal?
7. For ACE and UTEP program directors – Where in the program (or how?) do you work on the challenge of majority teachers teaching poor, minority students?
8. Whom should we talk to about this matter of preparing students to teach in urban public/urban Catholic/Jewish elementary schools? what it means, what students need to learn, what the challenges are, etc.?

Identity

9. We are also interested in how programs help students form their identity as teachers or as teachers in urban schools?
 - a. If we wanted to learn more about this issue of program impact on teachers' identity, who would we talk to? What aspects of the program should we study?

Career aspirations

10. What does the program expect its graduates to do? In other words, what career aspirations do you have for your graduates?
11. Where do students learn about what the program wants them to do or hopes they will do when they finish the program?
12. Where would you like to see your graduates in 5 years? Beyond that?

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