What Keeps Teachers In and What Drives Them Out: How Urban Public, Urban Catholic, and Jewish Day Schools Affect Beginning Teachers’ Careers

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Background: Teacher quality plays a key role in student learning outcomes. Yet, data suggest that elite college graduates who enter teaching are less likely to stay in schools serving low-income and minority students compared to other teachers. Thus, many educators and policy makers agree that in order to equalize the playing field, recruitment, preparation, and retention of high quality teachers should become a high priority.

Objective/Focus: This paper focuses on how beginning teachers’ passion, commitments, and knowledge to teach in urban public, Catholic, and Jewish schools interact with specific school conditions to shape their career choices. The study’s longitudinal dimension underscores the gradual shift that teachers make away from their preparation programs, highlighting how their professional growth becomes intimately associated with the conditions in their schools.

Population/Setting: This longitudinal study included 30 randomly selected beginning teachers who graduated from three mission-driven teacher education programs located at elite colleges: UTEP at the University of Chicago, ACE at the University of Notre Dame, and DeLeT at Brandeis University.

Research Design: We employed a comparative, longitudinal case-based study of 30 teachers from three programs. Teachers were interviewed during their second and fourth year in teaching.

Findings: This study demonstrates the ways in which professional cultures in schools may positively or negatively affect teachers in different school contexts. It illustrates the considerable impact school leaders have on the lives and career commitments of teachers. Finally, it confirms the positive impact that preparing teachers to teach in context (Context Specific Teacher Education) may have on teachers’ career commitments.
**Conclusions:** In order to support teachers’ initial commitments to their schools and students, schools need to take a proactive approach. We emphasize the primary role of school conditions and argue that teacher preparation takes a back seat after several years in terms of its impact on teacher career choices. The findings still suggest that preparation can have some effect on teachers’ preparedness to 1. teach in culturally diverse environments and/or 2. adapt to challenging demands in hard-to-staff schools. We believe that over the years, preparation and school conditions get tightly interwoven with each other. Yet, the comparative design of this research enables us to point out that when teachers were not adequately prepared to teach in particular schools they were more likely to move from their schools in search for more hospitable conditions.

**PREFACE**

On January 19, one day before Barack Obama’s inauguration, Joel I. Klein and Reverend Al Sharpton called upon the new president to make a bold move and address educational inequality in America’s schools:

We recommend that the incoming administration take most of the $30+ billion it now spends on K-12 education—including all of the funding it now spends on low-income students through Title I—and redirect the funding to support the recruitment and retention of top-flight teachers in underserved urban schools. (Klein & Sharpton, 2009)

Retaining high-quality teachers is a high priority because such teachers are crucial for meeting the learning needs of students, particularly in schools serving low-income minorities (Ingersoll, 2003; NCTAF, 2003; Rinke, 2008). Previous studies find consistent evidence that teacher retention and attrition could affect student learning in various ways. First, schools serving low-income students are more likely to employ young, inexperienced teachers who, on average, are less effective (e.g., Kane et al., 2006). Second, studies on school culture suggest that high attrition could be an obstacle for stability, sense of belonging, and development of a vibrant professional culture among teaching staff and administration (Kardos & Johnson, 2008), which are particularly essential when schools try to learn from past mistakes and improve. Third, teacher attrition could be very costly in terms of the time, money, and effort that are required to recruit and induct new teachers (Texas State Board for Educator Certification, 2000).

While many previous works have studied teacher retention and attrition among public and urban public school teachers, this paper adds both longitudinal and comparative dimensions to this literature. It focuses
on teachers who attended three mission-driven teacher preparation programs in an attempt to understand how the passion, commitments, and knowledge that these teachers bring to teaching in urban public, Catholic, and Jewish schools interact with specific school conditions to shape their career choices. The study's longitudinal dimension underscores the gradual shift that teachers make away from their preparation programs, highlighting how their professional growth becomes intimately associated with the conditions in their schools.

Finally, this study addresses rising attention to elite college graduates who join teaching through non-traditional programs that prepare teachers for teaching in hard-to-staff school sectors. These elite-college teachers are considered by many educators and policymakers to be a gleaming hope for the profession, yet as Henke et al. (2000) conclude, teachers with high academic achievements tend to leave the profession early on, particularly when they teach in an urban school district serving disadvantaged students. Understanding the ways these teachers respond to school conditions and how they construct their career choices may offer useful lessons to educators and policymakers who aspire to increase the share and support the service of elite-college graduates in the teaching force.

The findings presented in this paper emerge from the Choosing to Teach (CTT) study, a longitudinal qualitative study designed to understand how three teacher preparation programs and their teachers (serving urban public, urban Catholic, and Jewish schools) address the challenge of recruiting the very best teachers, preparing them to teach in particular kinds of schools, placing them in difficult school environments, and supporting their teaching and careers in teaching.

Thirty teachers in their first or second year of teaching were randomly selected to participate in this study. They graduated from three teacher education programs located at elite colleges: DeLeT (Day School Leadership Through Teaching) at Brandeis University, ACE (Alliance for Catholic Education) at the University of Notre Dame, and UTEP (Urban Teacher Education Program) at the University of Chicago. When we first interviewed these teachers, they were starting their careers and expressed overwhelming enthusiasm for and a commitment to a long teaching career in their respective school sectors. They explained that their teacher preparation programs not only provided them with opportunities to acquire effective teaching tools, but also helped them develop and strengthen their commitment to teach in their particular school context. These findings led us to speculate that despite the significant challenges teachers faced during their first and second years in teaching, strong affiliation and loyalty to their programs’ missions might help sustain them in teaching (Tamir, 2010). We were left with the following question: Would
affiliation, commitment, and identification with a teacher education program’s mission sustain long-term teaching careers in hard-to-staff schools? This paper analyzes findings from a second round of interviews with the same group of teachers two years later, during their third and fourth years of teaching. This time, in contrast to the first round of interviews, the teachers underplayed the role of their programs, emphasizing instead their school experience as the main factor affecting their career decisions. This paper explores the important roles that school leaders and school environment play in supporting or inhibiting teachers’ initial commitments to teaching in three school sectors, illustrating some of the complexities that teaching in these schools entails. In particular, we identify the main factors that seem to support or inhibit teachers’ decision to stay in a school, move to a different school, or leave teaching altogether and describe how they negotiate their role and career commitments as beginning teachers vis-à-vis their school leaders and peers.

In what follows, we review recent trends and findings concerning teacher retention and attrition in urban public, Catholic, and Jewish schools and then lay out a conceptual framework that builds on research in the field and corresponds to emerging findings from this particular study.

TEACHER CAREERS IN URBAN PUBLIC, URBAN CATHOLIC, AND JEWISH DAY SCHOOLS

There is a wide consensus among researchers that high-quality teachers are the single most important factor in schools affecting student learning outcomes (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 2000; Rice, 2003; Rockoff, 2004). Yet staffing all schools with such high-quality teachers is almost an impossible mission. One major impediment for teacher quality is mounting attrition among beginning teachers and the influx of newly hired inexperienced teachers. Teacher attrition has become a source of grave concern, because it means that on average schools lose teachers who are more experienced and effective in exchange for teachers who are relatively younger and less effective. In some schools, which are commonly known as hard-to-staff schools, teacher attrition is a problem that has already crippled the capacity of schools to teach effectively.

THE RETENTION CHALLENGE IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Studies of teacher careers show a consistent decline in the average number of years that teachers devote to teaching (Johnson & The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers, 2004; Margolis, 2008;
Peske, Liu, Johnson, Kauffman, & Kardos, 2001). Today’s teachers increasingly view teaching as one of several jobs they will take on during their working lives. During 2004–2005, public and private schools respectively lost 8.4% and 13.6% of their teachers (NCES, 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 about 50% leave within 5 years (the rate of attrition in urban districts is even higher). Exacerbating this problem 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 (NCES, 2007, p. 7). Urban public schools that serve primarily disadvantaged populations, those with the greatest need for high quality teachers, sustain disproportionately high turnover; 10.3% of their teachers move out every year (almost twice the percentage of teachers moving from private schools), usually to more affluent schools with better working conditions, and an additional 9.9% leave the profession for good (p. 9). Also illustrative of the urban schools’ dire situation is the fact that only 6% of the teachers responding to the National School and Staffing Survey (NSSS) said they would like to teach at an urban school. Most distressing, however, is the fact that teachers graduating from elite colleges who could elevate the prestige of teaching and bring higher academic standards to teaching are also those most likely to leave schools, particularly urban schools (Rockoff, 2004), for more lucrative jobs (Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2005; Henke, Chen, & Geis, 2000; Roberson, Keith, & Page, 1983). Scholars cite this failure to sustain a stable teaching force as a major impediment to creating and maintaining high levels of teacher quality (Ingersoll, 2001; Quartz & TEP Research Group, 2003; Rinke, 2008).

THE RETENTION CHALLENGE IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Urban Catholic schools, which serve increasingly diverse and disadvantaged populations, face some of the same challenges as public schools and share the need to retain high-quality professional teachers (e.g., O’Keefe, 2003). Catholic schools have had a particularly difficult time in the last few decades, as they struggled to replace the ever-dwindling population of the traditional religious workforce of nuns, brothers, and priests with a new cadre of “lay” teachers (McDonald, 2008). According to a U.S. Department of Education report, “In 1920, 92 percent of Catholic school staff members came from these religious professions; today that number is only 4 percent” (U.S. Department of Education, 2008, p. 20). As a result, Catholic schools and the Catholic establishment have been
forced to generate new recruitment and preparation strategies focused on “lay teachers.” Nonetheless, beyond recruitment and preparation, a major challenge facing many Catholic schools is retention of lay teachers who are lured by the higher salaries and better retirement and health insurance benefits of public schools (Cook & Engel, 2006). The problem of teacher attrition is illustrated in Provasnik and Dorfman’s (2005) findings. They note that “between the 1999–2000 and 2000–01 school years, private schools [of which Catholic schools are a majority] lost a greater percentage of teachers than public schools (21 vs. 15 percent)” (p. 17).

ACE, the Catholic teacher training program in the Choosing to Teach study, was established as a response to this need. Over the last decade, ACE, which was designed as a two-year service program, placed hundreds of teachers in Catholic schools. Many of these graduates stayed in teaching beyond their initial two-year commitment.

THE RETENTION CHALLENGE IN JDSs

Unlike many urban public and Catholic schools, Jewish day schools (JDSs) serve predominantly middle and upper class families. Nevertheless, these schools too find it hard to compete with suburban public schools in terms of teacher salary and benefits and by failing to offer similar professional development opportunities (e.g., Gamoran, Goldring, Robinson, Tammivaara, & Goodman, 1998; Gamoran, Goldring, & Robinson, 1999; Holtz, Gamoran, Dorph, Goldring, & Robinson, 2000). As a result, recruitment and retention of high-quality JDS teachers has become an ongoing challenge for many JDSs (Ben-Avie & Kress, 2008; Commission on Jewish Education in North America, 1990; Gamoran et al., 1998; Robinson et al., 1998; Schaap & Goodman, 2001; Tamir & Lesik, in preparation).

Recent studies of alumni from the DeLeT program report a more promising retention rate of 50% in classroom teaching after five years (Tamir, Feiman-Nemser, Silvera-Sasson, & Cytryn, 2010; Tamir & Magidin de Kramer, 2011; Tamir, 2012). All the while, findings from a more comprehensive study by Ben-Avie and Kress (2008) conclude that the Jewish teaching force is “‘graying’ [which] raises the likelihood that the Jewish educator population (fully qualified or not) will diminish over the next two decades” (p. 36).

WHY DO TEACHERS STAY IN, MOVE BETWEEN, OR LEAVE SCHOOLS?

Studying teacher retention is challenging because it involves multiple variables, which usually result in fractured research questions with limited
explanatory power. Recent meta-analyses (e.g., Borman & Dowling, 2008) and comprehensive literature reviews like those of Rinke (2008) have been somewhat more successful in capturing and mapping the relative significance of the various variables at play. They bring evidence showing that teacher retention and attrition are shaped by personal and life cycle factors (e.g., decision to create a family and have children), school organizational factors (e.g., the availability of professional development, professional culture, opportunities for professional advancement, and administration support), and external/societal factors (e.g., salary, student behavior and motivation, parents cooperation and respect, and the schools’ student bodies) (Borman & Dowling, 2008).

Studies on teacher careers also found that teacher satisfaction, sense of success, and sense of efficacy and preparedness were often correlated with a desire to teach long term (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). According to Ingersoll (2003), teachers’ dissatisfaction—which positively correlates with attrition—was primarily attributed to low compensation (54%; see also findings by Stinebrickner, 1998), insufficient or inappropriate mentoring and support from school leadership (43%), challenging student behaviors (23%), lack of control and influence over the school lives (17%), low student motivation (15%), large class sizes (7%), inadequate time for preparation (6%), and insufficient opportunities for professional advancement (6%).

Consistent with recent studies that focus on the characteristics of teachers’ work conditions as having a significant impact on teachers’ career decisions, this paper seeks to illuminate two important components that have not been addressed in previous studies: (1) the gradual shift from initial commitments related to personal beliefs and teacher preparation to school conditions as a prime determinant of teacher careers; (2) the differentiated role of various school conditions—particularly administration support and affiliation with professional culture—and the ways in which they interact with teachers’ intention to stay, move, or leave teaching.

THE IMPACT OF SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT AND LEADERSHIP ON TEACHER CAREERS

School context or school environment are general terms referring to institutional and/or organization-related variables that affect various social agents (among them teachers) within the school community. Following a long tradition of research (e.g., Little, 1987; Rosenholtz, 1989; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001), this paper asserts that the local school context is a powerful setting where teachers’ practice, professional values, and commitments are shaped.
School leaders, particularly principals or heads of school, retain critical power in shaping teachers’ careers through their multiple roles as administrative, and sometimes instructional, leaders and as facilitators of the school community. School leaders are those in charge of recruiting and selecting teachers and negotiating salaries (particularly in private and charter schools), introducing teachers to the school’s mission, setting expectations, providing evaluations, facilitating and supporting the professional culture, establishing bureaucratic procedures and mechanisms to ensure successful induction and professional development, supporting a sense of community, and offering personal and professional support to beginning teachers. Researchers find a direct link between the quality and effectiveness of school leaders and student achievement, as measured by student test scores (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003) and teacher attrition (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2009; Ingersoll, 2001).

Decades of research consistently show that school leaders play a critical role in developing strong professional communities (Bryk, Lee, Holland, 1993) and realigning them, so that they becomes more hospitable to beginning teachers (Kardos, Johnson, Peske, Kauffman, & Liu, 2001).

Kardos and Johnson (2008) argue that professional cultures that embraced clear expectations, communicated messages effectively, and had supportive administration were imperative for teacher growth and development. Weiss (1999) concludes that beginning teachers’ perception of their school culture as being collaborative and experiencing high levels of satisfaction from the support they received from school principals, peers, and students, were correlated with a higher likelihood of staying in teaching. Smith and Ingersoll (2004) show that teacher retention is partly explained by the schools’ capacity and willingness to engage beginning teachers in an induction process and to offer appropriate mentoring (all of which depend, to some extent, on the active support of principals).

There are certain differences between the three school sectors discussed in this paper in terms of the population they serve, their funding structure, and the degree of autonomy they enjoy, all of which may interact with or directly affect the capacity of school leaders to shape their schools. Urban Catholic schools seem to have a lot in common with urban public schools, but they also differ in certain ways. While both urban Catholic and public schools tend to serve low-income minorities and are faced with chronic lack of resources and crumbling infrastructure, Catholic schools are unable to enjoy legislative rulings that increase public funding to under-resourced public schools serving disadvantaged students (e.g., Abbott v. Burke in New Jersey, which forced the state to provide all students with “thorough and efficient education”). On the other
hand, the JDSs in our sample serve upper- and middle-class families and charge hefty tuition.

There are a few other differences at play. For example, the heads of Jewish schools and of some Catholic schools (where the archdiocese is no longer in control of the school) enjoy more autonomy compared to their counterparts in public schools but are also burdened by more responsibilities (e.g., fundraising, capital management, and teacher recruitment and selection) (Tornberg & Woocher, 1998). As a result, these heads may have more control over teacher retention in their schools, because they can carefully select teachers who will be a good fit for the school. On the other hand, decisions on teacher hiring and compensation, in the case of JDSs and Catholic schools, are very much dependent on how well the schools are able to enroll students and attract donors. Public school principals are more likely to receive higher funding per student but have less control over the ways funds will be used.

The downsides of the increased autonomy enjoyed by JDS and Catholic school leaders are intensified pressure and greater demands to focus on development. This may cause heads of school to lose control over their role as instructional leaders, a role critical for building a strong learning community and providing professional support to beginning teachers. While these hypotheses require further research, they build on observations of, and conversations I had with, administrators who try to balance their demanding responsibilities.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework of this paper rests on our analysis of teachers’ responses and review of the literature on teacher careers and school organizational variables. These lead us to combine Ingersoll’s classification of stayers, movers, and leavers with Kardos et al.’s (2001) work on teacher professional cultures. In other words, we use a framework that captures the various effects of schools’ organizational variables in conjunction with a useful classification of teacher career choices.

Ingersoll (2001) defines stayers as teachers who choose to stay and continue to teach in their school, movers as those who leave their schools in order to fill teaching positions in other schools, and leavers as those who leave teaching in favor of non-teaching career. Both the design and analysis of our findings refer to and build on this classification, which, according to Ingersoll and other scholars, is mostly driven by variables related to a school’s organizational/environmental conditions.

The professional culture framework developed by Kardos et al. (2001) describes three distinctly different types of school environments (based on
the availability or absence of mentoring, professional development, administration support, and collaboration with young and veteran teachers).

In the first type of school, which was largely populated by veteran teachers, professional culture was largely framed by veteran teachers’ perceptions, experiences, and concerns. Kardos et al. (2001) describe these veteran-oriented professional cultures as ranging “from friendly to cold, [and] accommodat[ing] many experienced teachers who operated independently and with little effect on each other’s teaching” (p. 261). In these schools, veterans rarely discuss or work with novice teachers on developing their professional practice.

In the second type of school, called novice oriented professional cultures, “inexperience, youth, and idealism prevailed” (Kardos et al., 2001, p. 261). These were schools that were either new and largely populated by young teachers or established failing schools, where a new principal and a group of new teachers were trying to turn around their school. These schools had strong collaborative culture that was not guided by experienced practitioners but rather driven by passion and zeal. As a result, “the special needs of the novice teacher were neither recognized nor addressed in the veteran-oriented or the novice-oriented professional cultures” (Kardos et al., p. 261).

The third type of school, named integrated professional cultures, describes schools where novice teachers’ needs were best addressed. In these schools, veterans offered constructive mentoring to novice teachers and collaborated with them. Teachers were part of one team instead of being part of opposing camps. Experts and novices “regularly engaged in deliberations about curriculum, instruction, and their shared responsibility for students” (Kardos et al., 2001, p. 261). All teachers reported to have benefited from the collaboration, but for beginning teachers, having access to knowledgeable veterans in a culture that sets clear expectations for professional growth was particularly valuable.

This framework is helpful because it offers a constructive, meaningful (non-idiosyncratic) approach to thinking about teacher working conditions and to illuminating the ways in which these conditions guide and shape the career choices of teachers. Nonetheless, this framework has some limitations, which apply to this study in particular. For example, its focus on school conditions means that other variables, such as teachers’ backgrounds and beliefs and the kind of preparation teachers went through, are left out of the framework. As a result, although our analysis will primarily focus on the relationships between school conditions and teacher retention, we have been mindful to incorporate, when appropriate, data and comments about additional factors that helped shape teacher careers.
DATA CODING

We conducted semi-structured, open-ended interviews with 30 randomly selected beginning teachers drawn equally from the three programs. Subjects from UTEP and DeLeT were interviewed during their first year; subjects from ACE were interviewed during their second year. The first set of face-to-face interviews was conducted with all 30 teachers; the second round of interviews was conducted 2 years later with 27 teachers (20 interviews were conducted face-to-face and 7 by phone). Three respondents (from ACE) who were in a process of relocation withdrew from the study. Interviews lasted 80 to 120 minutes and were tape-recorded and transcribed. Participants were compensated for their time with $25 gift cards.

As we read and coded the data from the second interviews, we found evidence to suggest that when teachers discussed their work and career trajectories, their statements often focused on how professional challenges were associated with school-related factors—and, more specifically, the types and level of support they received from administrators and colleagues. Teachers also occasionally discussed other factors, like students’ and parents’ lack of cooperation; low salaries; class and ethnic tensions; or their initial desire to serve the Jewish, Catholic, or urban school communities and meet the expectations of their teacher preparation programs. These factors are interwoven in teachers’ stories and thoughts about their careers, as illustrated in the discussion to follow.

These emerging findings from interviews with teachers guided our literature review, shaped our research questions, and refocused our coding, primarily around school-related factors and teacher careers. Using the qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti, we created a coding scale scheme of school and teacher characteristics, which consisted of hundreds of open codes. After careful analysis, we identified salient themes and condensed our codes as follows: (1) strong vs. weak professional community of teachers; (2) strong vs. weak leadership support; (3) teachers’ motivations and commitments; and (4) teachers’ relationships with and perceptions of students, parents, and the school community.

The author and a research assistant read all transcripts and marked them electronically with open codes, which were later condensed to super codes or themes. To assure reliability, the rule of thumb was to assign a particular super code to open codes only when the transition to the super code was self-explanatory and required minimum interpretation. The author and research assistant discussed and reviewed coded interviews frequently to maintain high level of agreement.

For example, we started with a long list of open codes describing teachers’ commitment to teaching. Some teachers said they would like to go to
graduate school next year; other teachers mentioned their desire to stay in teaching for five more years; others said that “teaching is my career”; still others said they were not sure what they would like to do next. In order to provide a clearer picture about teacher retention plans, the next step involved condensing teacher responses into a meaningful scale informed by the relevant literature. The various responses of teachers included a category of those who had already left teaching, those who will leave after four years in the classroom, those who will teach five years or more, those who say they will teach for a period longer than 8-10 years (“teaching is my career”), and those who don’t know (may leave after one more year or may decide to stay longer, depending on various considerations).

In addition, drawing on previous studies, we categorized teachers into three groups—stayers, movers, and leavers—and explored how these categories link to the types of support teachers received at their schools. For instance, we looked at all those who moved or left teaching and tried to understand their experiences. Where did they move (within school sector or out of it)? Did they get support from their school principals? Did they get mentoring or have opportunities to work with colleagues on curriculum and instruction? Did they feel they were making a difference for students and were they personally rewarded by their work?

While much of our inquiry was guided by grouping open codes into super codes that were often aligned with previous findings in the literature, we were mindful not to force these pre-existing frameworks on our open codes. In many cases, particularly when we coded teachers’ experiences in the Jewish and Catholic contexts, we identified new factors that teachers related to their commitment to teaching.

**CTT TEACHERS’ CHARACTERISTICS**

This following section intends to provide some demographic details about CTT teachers in order to help contextualize their reports. CTT teachers completed an undergraduate degree, after which they joined UTEP, DeLeT, or ACE to pursue a Masters of Arts in teaching. Their age ranged from 23 to 27, suggesting they all started teaching relatively young (except for one DeLeT teacher who decided to change careers early on, classroom teaching was the first full time job these individuals held). As for gender, most of our teachers were females (22) and 8 were males (see Table 1). DeLeT and UTEP had 2 males and 8 females (which correlates with the gender composition of teachers in the U.S.). ACE, which on average recruits a higher percentage of men to its program, had 4 males and 6 females in the CTT sample.
Consistent with general teaching force data, CTT teachers are primarily young, middle-class, White Caucasian females. While DeLeT teachers seem very similar to their students in terms of their ethnic and class backgrounds (middle- or upper-class Jewish Caucasian), it is almost entirely the opposite case for ACE teachers, who are primarily middle- or upper-class White Caucasians teaching Hispanic and Afro-American students from low-income families. Our sample suggests that the race composition of UTEP is slightly more diverse than that of ACE and thus slightly more aligned with the student population taught by these teachers.

In addition to being categorized by their demographic details, teachers were also categorized as stayers, movers, or leavers. As can be seen in Table 1, most CTT teachers either stayed (14) or moved (13); only 3 left the profession. The picture gets more complicated when looking more closely at teachers from each of the programs. As it turns out, 8 DeLeT teachers stayed at their schools, 1 moved to a different school, and 1 left teaching. Six UTEP teachers stayed at their schools, and 4 others moved to new schools. None of the ACE teachers in our sample stayed. Instead, 8 moved to new schools, and the other 2 left teaching.

Finally, Table 1 also reports on the sector and type of school CTT teachers worked in during our second interview with them. The list suggests that UTEP teachers taught in urban public schools (7 taught in regular urban public schools, and 2 taught in charter schools). These highly segregated schools were situated in Chicago’s South Side, and their student population, for the most part, was low-income African American or Latino. Some of the schools were well established, with strong leadership and ties to philanthropists and the community, while others were impoverished and on the brink of closure.

All 10 ACE teachers continued to teach in Catholic schools. While the initial intention of the teachers and their program was to serve low-income students attending urban Catholic schools, 5 teachers continued to teach in such schools after four years, while the other 5 decided to pursue teaching positions in Catholic schools that serve middle- and upper-class families.

All 10 DeLeT teachers taught in JDSs, which tend to be relatively homogeneous in terms of the population they serve—mostly middle- and upper-class families of religiously liberal Jews who would usually identify themselves as non-Orthodox—but vary in size, quality of leadership, and financial stability.

In the analysis and discussion to follow, we explore the complex reasons that motivated teachers’ career decisions, with a particular focus on the impact that school support variables had on their decisions.
### Table 1. Summary of CTT Teachers’ Characteristics (Gender, Race, Career, and Current Type and School Sector) ($N=30$)

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<th>DeLeT</th>
<th>CTT Total</th>
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<td><strong>Current school (sector and type)</strong></td>
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* Teacher stated intention to leave teaching by the end of the academic year.

**TEACHER RETENTION AND CAREER CHOICES: A LONGITUDINAL LOOK**

Previously, when we analyzed the first round of interviews with CTT teachers, we found that teachers expressed high motivation to serve as teachers or leaders in their particular schools and communities. For example, 80% of the teachers said they were confident they would teach for more than 5 years (Tamir, 2010), which stands in stark contrast to national teaching force data, which show only a 50% retention rate among beginning teachers (Ingersoll, 2001). This level of commitment to teaching is notable when considering the fact that two-thirds of the teachers in this study (those from UTEP and ACE) are teaching in schools that serve low-income minorities in urban settings and/or in hard-to-staff schools that, on average, pay low salaries and benefits (which is the case in JDSs and Catholic schools). Data suggest that in these schools, teacher attrition tends to be considerably higher than the national average.

Below is a graphic illustration of CTT teacher careers based on their two interviews. In Figure 1 below, one of the things that stands out is that overall, CTT teachers remain committed to pursuing a career in teaching.
Eighty-three percent of CTT teachers said they are likely to stay in teaching at least 5 years in the classroom, compared to the national average of 50%.

**Figure 1. Teacher Retention Across Programs - 2006 vs. 2008**

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**WHAT KEEPS TEACHERS IN AND WHAT DRIVES THEM OUT: THE IMPACT OF PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITIES AND ADMINISTRATION SUPPORT**

**STAYERS**

Most CTT teachers chose to stay in their schools. This tendency was particularly visible among DeLeT and UTEP graduates whose teachers, for the most part, reported receiving school and peer support around hiring, mentorship, and formal induction. In fact, many seemed to find themselves in schools with integrated professional cultures, which are associated with the professional integrative culture, as discussed by Kardos and Johnson (2008).

Josh, a DeLeT teacher who was asked about his decision to stay at his school, provided a set of hypothetical questions he asks himself, which reflect a strong desire for collegial support and opportunities to grow:
One important consideration is do I see myself growing as a teacher in this environment? Do I have mentors here, formal and informal mentors? Are there role models here for me and people who I feel I’m still learning a lot from? And the answer is yes, absolutely. And, of course, there’s a little wallet check each time and my timing seems to have been good, because we’ve increased teacher salaries the last two years in a row . . . And then . . . there’s just the gut check of, like, am I happy? Am I doing something from day to day that feels good and feels satisfying, and I think I’ve answered . . . yes, because even though the first year had its challenges and the second year was much easier, but there were still things that I was hoping would change that I’d like to see change—Each of those times the administration has been very responsive to thinking about considering those changes and listening to those challenges and taking that into consideration for the future, so I’ve been happy.

Josh’s decision to stay centered on his sense of satisfaction about being a teacher whose professional concerns and needs are addressed by a viable professional culture and taken seriously by the school administration. Rebecca offered a similar account for staying at her school. In addition to the mentors and principals who helped her grow professionally, she also praised her school’s culture as one that encourages teachers to use their creativity and explore ways to strengthen their practice.

I feel like the school has been a place where I’ve been able to do everything that I wanted to try, do anything I wanted to do . . . I’ve also felt like there have been different people in different years that have been huge supports: like work with a particular special educator one year, work with a particular principal for a few years. That was extremely supportive. This year the school is supporting me in a curriculum development about values, in collaboration with [a research center that hosts] the DeLeT program, so I feel like it’s just a very supportive place, although it’s very far away [from where I live, which is] a downfall. But that’s why I stayed as opposed to looking at another Boston-area school.

These two responses express a general sense among most DeLeT teachers in our sample that their schools were helping them grow professionally by providing opportunities for collaboration and interaction with veteran mentors and principals. That resonates with the kind of inte-
grated professional culture so valued by the beginning teachers studied by Johnson and her colleagues (2004).

UTEP teachers who decided to stay at their first school taught in somewhat different schools. Some mentioned having supportive relationships with peers and/or administrators and being provided with opportunities for professional development, but on balance their experiences were not as positive. Some UTEP teachers chose to stay in what they described as “completely dysfunctional schools”; others stayed in new, exciting schools that they helped to establish but where professional development of veteran teachers was scarce.

Kelly, a UTEP teacher in a charter school, decided to stay, because she felt that everybody at her school held a similar vision of social justice, and because there was a strong sense of school community and shared values.

My school actually aligns really well with the mission [of] UTEP . . . It’s a social justice school; they want to close the achievement gap between minorities and white children. It has a lot of resources to do so. There’s a lot—like, all the teachers are really smart, and there’s a lot of collaboration, lot of professional development. But the one thing I like knowing is that every teacher in the school is on the same page . . . In some schools, like in a CPS [Chicago Public School], you may feel like you’re the only teacher trying to, you know, teach the social, emotional skills for children, or you’re the only teacher trying to work for social justice, and then when you pass your kids on to the next level, you feel like “Oh, man,” you know, “they’re going to get that teacher, and they’re going to erase all the work I’ve done this whole year.” Whereas at my school, it’s like I feel confident passing my kids on to the other teachers . . .

This teacher conveys a deep sense of ownership and pride in her charter school. She describes herself as part of a select group who helped shape the school from the start. She describes strong feelings of attachment toward her principal and peers. Thus, although she is well aware of the downsides involved in teaching at her school, in particular the relatively long hours and reduced paycheck compared to those of teachers in Chicago Public Schools, she had no second thoughts.

I feel good. Like, I don’t know how to encapsulate the emotion, but I just feel secure. I feel . . . [at] home or something. I couldn’t imagine really teaching anywhere else just because of the relation-
ships I’ve built with the principal and the teachers and how smart everybody is, and it’s—I think it’s a great decision for me.

Kelly’s description of her school fits with the characteristic of what Kardos and Johnson (2008) call a “novice oriented professional culture.” Not all UTEP teachers who stayed at their original schools felt as supported, and some criticized their administration or colleagues. Often, these teachers were motivated to stay by a desire to see their students develop and succeed and to create the classroom they hoped to have. In the absence of school support, they tried to take charge of their professional growth as beginning teachers and find alternative ways to support their growth. Take, for example, Jen, who debated the pros and cons of staying at her school:

I felt like they [the administration] were incompetent. I felt like they really didn’t understand what classroom, what classroom community, what school community, should look like. So I was really sort of thinking . . . I don’t know if I’m going to stay. I know students need teachers like me . . . but I think I might need a more supportive environment, an environment where the administration knows what they’re doing . . . However, towards the end of the year, I felt like, one, I had actually student taught at this school . . . So now, I’m actually receiving about seven or eight students from that classroom . . . so I was excited about seeing where they went after I left them . . . and where I can take them again in the year that’s coming. Another thing that influenced my decision was that I feel like I’m still establishing myself as a teacher. And even though I feel like I have grown over the past couple of years, I feel like I need one more year; at least, if not another one more year, to sort of work out different content areas and . . . improve myself and know that . . . if I went to another school, regardless of the administration or what type of demographic it was, that I would be able to teach there and teach well.

Jen, despite an unsupportive administration and the need to develop herself professionally, found comfort and professional support by connecting with another UTEP teacher at her school. Together they tried to plan and find ways to push their students forward, using the skills and knowledge they acquired in UTEP.

Other major thing that influenced my decision to stay . . . was the other teacher from UTEP . . . Even just yesterday, we got together to start planning a reading workshop. And we both
kind of looked at each other when we were finished, and we said, like, “Wow, that feels so much better.” It’s so much easier, in a way, because we both have the same vision. We both know where we want to take our kids . . . Whereas last year . . . I didn’t have someone to sort of bounce those ideas off of.

Jen’s account is powerful. She persevered, despite teaching in a school that did not support her needs. In fact, Jen’s school has what Kardos and Johnson (2008) call “a veteran-oriented professional culture,” which they identify as the one least supportive of beginning teachers. With the recent proliferation of teacher alumni networks, it would be interesting to check if Jen’s case is the exception that proves the rule, or a good example of a new trend of teachers who reach out to like-minded partners (in or out of the school) in order to improve their practice.

Overall, administration support and school culture were important factors in UTEP teachers’ considerations of their future careers. When teachers felt supported as beginners by their administration and peers, they stayed. Nevertheless, a few UTEP teachers decided to stay in their schools despite working under extreme conditions with a complete lack of school support. These teachers were highly motivated to make a difference in the lives of students and, as we saw in the case of Jen, managed by forming their own supportive professional relationships with like-minded colleagues from UTEP (or elsewhere) with similar commitments and images of good teaching.

MOVERS

As we have seen, moving from school to school was a common practice, particularly among ACE teachers once they finished their first two years of teaching. Previous research on movers emphasized the exodus of teachers from urban schools with minorities and low-income students to suburban schools that cater to middle-class families and offer better salaries and improved working conditions (Borman & Dowling, 2008). Teachers who consider moving, like those who leave, are often dissatisfied with their school cultures and the support provided by their administrations. These factors played a key role in the moves of ACE and UTEP teachers as well.

In the case of ACE, moving was also associated with the fact that ACE teachers sign on to serve for two years with no choice about the geographic location of their school. Our study suggests that once ACE teachers complete their two years of service, they, for the most part, decide to continue teaching in a Catholic school in a different area. In some
cases, the move is motivated by a desire to teach in a Catholic community more culturally familiar to the teacher from his pre-ACE life. This seems equivalent to (White) teachers leaving urban public schools for suburban schools. This may also reflect the possibility that ACE did not enable teachers to learn strategies and develop dispositions needed to become culturally responsive teachers.

For example, Dave, an ACE teacher, illustrates the desire to go back to the familiar when he returns to teach in his hometown (in an urban Catholic school attended by his parents). His enthusiasm about moving to a familiar environment is clearly reflected in the following:

Oh, I mean, it has been wonderful. It’s so easy [to teach here]. I mean, I was greeted kind of like a homecoming. When people found out that I was coming . . . they were really excited . . . It has made it a great joy to be able to put together lessons for these kids. 'Cause I feel like . . . they are kind of my people . . . they are my kids so I’m pretty happy about that.

Reading between the lines, however, Dave’s decision to move back to his hometown may also relate to the cultural/racial challenges he experienced in his initial placement at an urban school serving Latino students, so different from the schools in which he grew up.

Angela, an ACE teacher who was both challenged by a lack of support from the administration in her first urban Catholic school (serving Latino students) and overwhelmed by the culture and ethnicity of her students and their families in her second Catholic school (serving an African-American community), offered the following response when asked how her current school differs from her first school:

Well, Saint George [school pseudonym] is 100% Afro-American . . . and I guess parental involvement is a lot less than St. Luke’s Parish [school pseudonym], but we have a wonderful administrator here. That really makes the difference.

This case further illustrates the important role that a strong, supportive principal plays in helping teachers overcome their initial cultural misconceptions in order to cope more effectively with the challenge of teaching in a culturally diverse environment. In both this and the previous case, teachers felt a lack of parental involvement. Yet, in Dave’s case, this motivated him to move, while Angela chose to stay, because she felt her principal gave her some tools and put her on a track to resolve some of the challenges she was facing.
The story of Karen, a third ACE teacher, further emphasizes the importance of the school administration’s role in creating a supportive professional culture. Karen, who taught in an urban Catholic school serving low-income Latino students, described a complete lack of administration support, which prompted her move to a school in the same city where she could form and share with peers a culture of learning:

... it [my departure] was just a sad story of inner city school leadership. This happened at the end of my third year... [I] had a lot of constraints, like [I was] stuck in the same place... [where I could] just literally lock [my] door, because [I knew] of the chaos outside of that one classroom... The thing is that in my opinion the culture of learning extends beyond just one classroom and can be enhanced if the whole school is involved in it.

Or consider how Dorothy, an ACE teacher who moved from an urban school serving low-income Latino students to an urban school serving White upper-class students, describes her career decision:

I moved to Raytown [pseudonym for her current city] after I finished the ACE program [i.e., finished her two years of teaching service] and I was not sure what I wanted to do... I did not know if I wanted to be in the classroom. I liked my time in Calexno [pseudonym for her previous city], but it was very difficult... There is definitely a stronger focus here on professional development, on professionalism. I feel held accountable for student learning a lot more here... I felt there that I was more of a caretaker... so [the move to my new school] has been a huge difference in the leadership.

Moving to the new school allowed Dorothy to feel satisfied about what she does (“here I feel like a professional”), since her school provides rigorous professional development and sets high expectations for both staff and students. Sadly, her story parallels that of other ACE teachers who leave schools serving minority, low-income students to teach in schools with students from well-to-do families. This pattern illustrates the link between poor school leadership, low teacher satisfaction, and career transition. These findings regarding beginning urban Catholic teachers’ reasons for moving to a different school parallel those of many urban public school teachers.

UTEP and DeLeT had a considerably lower rate of movement. The few teachers who did leave their initial school blamed their move on
inadequate student conduct and/or poor support of their administrators. These teachers continued to experience challenges in their second school, particularly in their relationship with peers, but unlike their first experience, this time they had supportive administrators on their side. Thus, despite the challenges, teachers felt able to continue teaching and to advance small-scale changes in their schools. This is yet another sign of the critical role that administrators can play in teachers’ decisions to stay in their schools.

For example, Shira, a DeLeT graduate, was forced to leave her first school after her position was eliminated. She reported having a mixed experience at her current school. She opposes the rigid separation of academic and religious studies that characterizes the way her school operates but finds it hard to express her dissenting views publicly. All the while, she feels that the new head of school is trying to implement positive changes by recruiting “progressive” women teachers. These emerging trends at her school encourage her to lead small-scale changes despite challenges from veteran colleagues. She noted,

I should mention that the staff has changed significantly. The first year that I was hired there were only [a few] women . . . and then this past year women [more than doubled their number], and so every year they’ve been hiring more women, more progressive teachers . . . [who help change the way the school] think[s] students should be educated . . . So that’s made a big difference in who my colleagues are and who I can ask to pull together. So the [X]th grade teachers tend to be really open-minded, very progressive teachers, and so to come together and actually communicate and work together has been something that I’ve seen a lot of interest in . . . They just need [my] leadership . . . So I kind of feel like I need to pick my battles, and the first place I want to start is uniting the secular studies teachers and hoping that we’ll be able to have more of those connections.

Shira’s story does not fit neatly into the professional cultures described by Kardos and Johnson (2008). While her school seems to be dominated by veteran teachers, Shira believed that the head of school was beginning to create a counterculture in which beginning teachers are pushing for change.

The story of Charlie, a graduate of the UTEP program, reinforces the importance of professional culture and administrative support. Charlie used to teach (as a first year teacher) in an all African American urban school that served middle- and upper-class families as well as working class
families. In this school, he was expected to be a master teacher from day one, and other teachers and staff often asked for his professional advice. The administration expected him to succeed without offering any kind of support, while his colleagues and supervisors closely scrutinized his teaching. When asked to compare his current school to this school, he made the following observation:

[In my first school] every little thing I did . . . people would judge it and critique it. Here [in the new school], I get more space to just develop, and then I get more space to fail, and it’s acceptable. Like, they don’t expect me to be the best teacher here, which is really—at the other school, they expected me to be this super teacher in my first year because I was coming out of the University of Chicago and all that . . . I did not like it because it was my first year so it’s kind of setting you up for failure if they think you are an expert and then you are not performing like an expert . . . Here, I am more supported.

Still, Charlie’s methods and approaches were not received well by veteran colleagues at his new school.

Other teachers are not doing this [guided reading as taught in UTEP], so there is a sense of resentment when a new teacher comes in and does something different and not do, like, the same old traditional teaching that they are used to. So they kind of don’t like that, because progressive education, it’s a lot more work than traditional ways of teaching.

Nevertheless, when asked specifically if he can be the teacher he wants to be in his current school and what makes that possible, he replied: “The principal supports what I do and allows me to do what I want to do, and she is not pushing any specific curriculum or anything like that.”

Charlie experienced a professional culture dominated by veteran teachers and his move reflects a desire, which has been partly realized, to work in a more supportive environment.

To conclude, the decision of almost all ACE teachers to move from their first school placement was particularly noteworthy. These decisions reveal important threads in teachers’ experience and thinking that might be related to the combination of personal, programmatic, and school related reasons that, taken together, encouraged teachers to move. Here, in brief, are the main reasons: (1) the short summer preparation of ACE (compared to a year-long internship of UTEP and DeLeT); (2) the
cultural and class differences between the primarily White, middle-class teachers of Notre Dame and their low-income Latino and African American students; (3) the desire to teach in a suburban school near home; and (4) the uncooperative work environments with weak professional culture and insufficient administration support.

Challenging school conditions also shaped the decisions of UTEP and DeLeT teachers who were sometimes overwhelmed by a lack of school support. The difference, however, is that DeLeT teachers experienced minimal cultural shock, since they were teaching in schools similar to those they attended, working with children from families similar to their own. The few DeLeT teachers who did not attend JDSs themselves had the opportunity to gradually learn about the school organizational and cultural environment during their year-long internship. UTEP teachers experienced similar challenges to those of ACE teachers in terms of fitting in with their schools. They nonetheless enjoyed the advantage of a full year of internship in a Chicago public school before taking a job at the same district. Teaching in the location where they trained also allowed them to stay connected to program alumni and faculty.

LEAVERS

Since the literature reports the high likelihood of beginning teachers from selective colleges leaving teaching, we were surprised to find that very few teachers in the study ended up leaving teaching. Even more surprising was the fact that very few ACE teachers left teaching, even though the program recruits individuals for two years of service. Rob, one of the two who left, went to law school, a career choice he wanted to pursue before enrolling in ACE.

While I loved the experience and I loved doing it, teaching was really not what I was meant to be doing. So, I decided to go to law school because I’m still really interested in education policy and want to use my love for education in a way that I can also use the law . . .

Nonetheless, throughout the interview, Rob reports some experiences that may have contributed to his decision to leave as well. For example, Rob felt that “. . . the administration was very hands off, for better or worse . . . [which] is difficult [in] your first year, because you don’t really feel like you know anything, and you would like a little bit of guidance.” Rob also felt lonely being away from his family, as did many of his program peers: “I was very far away from my family, so I knew I wouldn’t stay
there.” When combined, these two reasons alone may discourage most beginning teachers, even those who are highly motivated to stay (let alone those who joined teaching for a short term before returning to graduate school).

The two UTEP teachers who planned to leave teaching in the following academic year were somewhat more apologetic about their decision. They felt badly about leaving their colleagues and students and failing to realize UTEP’s expectations. They described a complex set of experiences that led to their decision. Carol’s story seems at first to represent an anomaly, since she reports feeling supported by the school leadership and most of her colleagues (particularly by a UTEP alumnus she helped to recruit). At the same time, she felt betrayed after the administration reversed a promise not to expand her class and increased it from 20 to 30 students. When asked about the major factor that drove her out of teaching, she responded:

Really, the main reason I’m leaving is because I kind of got tired of hearing kids tell each other they’re gay all day and got tired of telling kids to sit down and be quiet and get back to work . . . Like, actually the 9- and 10-year-olds have gotten in the way more of me teaching than the administration has. The administration has said, ‘Go for it,’ and has given me as many resources they can.

While it is hard to identify what drove Carol out, her words echo those of other beginning teachers who reported leaving teaching because of challenging student behaviors (e.g., Ingersoll, 2003). Although Carol is careful not to blame her administration, her story does raise questions about the passive role the administration took in her case, the lack of initiative to offer classroom management support, and the blunt decision to increase her class size.

The story of Shannon, another UTEP teacher who decided to leave teaching, reflects similar themes. Shannon, too, experienced difficulties with student behavior but, unlike Carol, felt she was not being adequately supported by her administration. She mentions the overemphasis on testing but credits the principal for letting her teach outside the prescribed curriculum. Looking back on her decision to enter teaching, she did not recall having a real passion to teach; rather, she convinced herself that teaching was the right path for her. The following passage summarizes her mixed feelings about teaching in her school:

To some extent, I had a great deal of autonomy to plan units or lessons and that sort of thing. The challenge has come with—and,
I mean, there’s a significant emphasis on testing, but there’s also a lot of creativity, and the principal is—I guess I got on her good side in the beginning, and so she’s been pretty hands-off with me. Other people have had different experiences, but I’ve been able to do units on things like hunger and homelessness and the environment and, you know, a much more drawn-out African American history unit than other people I’ve spoken to have had the opportunity to do. But there are also, you know, significant challenges there, such as, you know, student behavior and lack of support from the administration regarding to that.

These two cases reflect the complexity involved in making (and interpreting) a decision to leave teaching. Despite their complex stories, both teachers describe not being satisfied with their jobs and working in largely inhospitable school environments. Reading through these teachers’ accounts, it becomes clear that they were not provided with appropriate support consistent with their needs and could not find opportunities to grow professionally.

The story of Michaela, a DeLeT teacher, shares some similarities with the previous stories of teachers who decided to leave teaching. Throughout her preparation and internship, she felt ambivalent about teaching: “It wasn’t like, you know, ‘Oh, my god, this has been my dream to be a teacher my whole life. And it’s finally coming true.’ It’s sort of, I’m going to try this, and I’m going to see.” The first year was very difficult for Michaela, who claimed she did not receive the preparation time she needed at her school. As a result, she reported, “I just found that it [teaching] consumed my life to a degree that I didn’t think was healthy.” Exacerbating the situation even more was the fact that she and her co-teacher did not get along professionally, as they held very different approaches to teaching, and the administration did not try to intervene or find ways to facilitate a more productive relationship between the two teachers.

Here we see a case of a relatively young teacher teaching with a veteran teacher who is also her mentor. When their relationship soured, and the administration was unable to resolve the disagreements or find an alternative solution, Michaela started to feel increasingly dissatisfied with her job and the support she received, and became completely disillusioned with pursuing a teaching career.

To conclude, on the surface, the teachers who left teaching might seem less committed to teaching in hard-to-staff schools compared with those who stayed or moved. Looking at their experiences closely, however, reveals a less clear-cut pattern. One way to interpret these stories is to read
them as missed opportunities by school mentors and peers to form a supportive professional culture that acknowledges beginning teachers and helps them grow. School administrators also share the blame for teacher attrition. Their leadership and commitment is paramount in establishing a supportive professional culture and for making new teachers feel welcome and essential at the school.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Previous studies in general education have pointed out that school organizational variables, like administration support and professional culture, are paramount for understanding teacher retention and attrition. Findings from the Choosing to Teach study partially corroborate this research. Indeed, teachers in our sample who did not receive adequate support from administrators and peers, regardless of their school affiliation, were more likely to leave their initial school placements early on.

Furthermore, even when other factors were visible, administration support and professional community seem to have shaped teachers’ plans in a profound way. For example, while the mission of the ACE program may partly explain why many ACE teachers move from their initial placements, looking closely at what teachers said reveals that a school’s working conditions and culture—particularly the lack of collaboration with peers and the absence of a unified vision for the school, as well as weak administrative involvement and guidance (which could have helped some teachers overcome their cultural deficit perceptions)—were all essential components in determining teacher transition and attrition.

Throughout the analysis, we tried to apply and integrate Ingersoll’s classifications of stayers, movers, and leavers with the theoretical model of Kardos and colleagues (2001) on professional culture. Our findings suggest that many of the teachers who moved or left (but also a few of those who stayed) experienced patterns consistent with the veteran oriented professional culture, where teachers are isolated, collaboration rarely happens, and beginning teachers do not receive meaningful mentorship. Very few of our teachers encountered novice oriented professional cultures, which emphasize a school partnership run by young energetic teachers and a principal, all very committed to the mission of the school, but with little veteran knowledge or experience to rely on. We also had a few teachers—from those who stayed at their schools—who described a school environment similar to the integrated professional culture. These teachers were from DeLeT and UTEP; none were from ACE. They reported working in schools that acknowledged their status as beginning teachers and put structures in place to support their professional growth through extensive mentoring,
collaboration, observations, and feedback from peers and leaders, and by allowing new teachers space to experiment and fail. A sizable fourth group of CTT teachers taught in schools that were probably located somewhere between the *veteran* and *integrative* professional cultures. These teachers provided mixed stories that included various conflicting elements, like a school that had strong traditional veteran culture but also had a principal who recruited beginning teachers and encouraged them to organize a counterculture emphasizing professional collaboration among teachers.

Besides applying and confirming previous theoretical models, the importance of this study is in its capacity to illuminate complex interactions between persons, programs, and contexts. We intentionally focused on the school experiences of teachers who were recruited and prepared in three mission-driven, context-specific teacher education programs located in elite colleges, illustrating how they negotiated different aspects of their backgrounds, aspirations, and motivations with teaching in a particular context (urban schools in Chicago, urban Catholic schools in L.A., or JDSs in Boston).

Using this qualitative approach, we have shown that behind the large-scale statistics about the factors affecting beginning teachers to stay, move, or leave, there are complex interactions that guide teachers’ decisions. Furthermore, we show that average statistics do not necessarily convey the whole story but sometimes, rather, flatten and wipe out important differences between individuals and groups. Throughout the analysis, we demonstrate that, by and large, teachers from elite colleges who were recruited and prepared for teaching in a specific school sector might develop powerful commitments to their schools, their students, the community, and to teaching, which could result in longer teaching service (see also, Tamir, 2009, 2010). Like other teachers, CTT teachers craved a guiding hand at school to mentor and support them. When they found it, they thrived. When they did not, they tried reaching out to peers from their programs. When that did not work, they often decided to try teaching in a different school with more hospitable working conditions, or, on rare occasions, to leave teaching.

Finally, although we emphasize in this paper the primary role of school conditions and argue that teacher preparation takes a back seat after several years, in terms of its impact on teacher career choices, it should be noted that the findings still suggest that preparation can have some effect on teachers’ preparedness to 1) teach in culturally diverse environments and/or 2) adapt to challenging demands in hard-to-staff schools. We believe that over the years, preparation and school conditions get tightly interwoven with each other. Yet the comparative design of this research
enables us to point out that when teachers were not adequately prepared to teach in particular schools, they were more likely to move from their schools in search of more hospitable conditions (see the example of ACE teachers in our sample who moved from their initial placements).

FUTURE RESEARCH

The need to improve teacher quality and to retain effective teachers is not likely to diminish in the near future. This study focuses on teacher retention among a group of teachers prepared in teacher education programs located in elite institutions of higher education. Despite the small size and qualitative nature of the study, it offers some new evidence that satisfactory levels of retention among this group of teachers are possible and can be achieved if teachers receive context-specific preparation and, most importantly, if particular working conditions are set in place.

Future research should consider other promising models that seek to recruit, prepare, and retain teachers for particular kinds of schools (e.g., urban public schools serving low-income minority students). We need to understand why teachers with different backgrounds and preparation decide to stay, move, or leave; how teachers from different programs develop as professionals; and how they negotiate their role and place in schools with different professional cultures. In particular, it would be helpful to understand how interventions (e.g., specific mentoring and professional development models), which we already know can make a difference at the school or district level in terms of increased retention, interact with particular teacher preparation, teacher background, and dispositions.

Meanwhile, it seems that context-specific teacher education programs are gaining ground, particularly in urban districts around the country. Many of these programs, such as New York City Teaching Fellows, Boston Teacher Residency, and Center X at UCLA, explicitly recruit elite college teachers and prepare them to teach in particular urban districts. Some of these programs (unlike Teach For America) also have strong retention rates. Although there is some research on these programs, we need to continue studying such programs from a comprehensive and comparative perspective. We need to understand what helps graduates from these programs to stay in schools and whether and how their performance differs from other teachers in their district, using multiple outcome measures (student test scores, student portfolios, principal evaluation).
Notes

1. This paper is part of the Choosing to Teach Project, which has been directed by the author and is supported by grants from the Mandel Center for Studies in Jewish Education at Brandeis University and the Spencer Foundation. For more information on previous papers and our upcoming book, go to: http://www.brandeis.edu/mandel/research/choosing/index.html. I like to thank Sharon Feiman-Nemser, Karen Hammerness, Sarah Birkeland, Susan Fendrick, and TCR anonymous reviewers for their useful comments and suggestions. Special thanks also to my colleagues on the Choosing to Teach research team (Sharon Feiman-Nemser, Karen Hammerness, Bethamie Horowitz, and Kavita Kapadia Matsko) who helped design and conduct the interviews with teachers. Conclusions and interpretations are those of the author.

2. These programs prepare teachers to serve in urban public, urban Catholic, and JDSs and have all been explicitly designed around a particular vision of teaching in specific kinds of school communities. We have termed these programs “context-specific teacher education,” arguing that such programs are built around a particular curricular vision of good teaching in a particular context, of the important tools and strategies necessary for that context, and of the roles of teachers and the purposes of education (for a broader discussion about context-specific teacher education, see Dallavis & Holter, 2010; Feiman-Nemser & Tamir, 2010; Grinberg, 2010; Hammerness & Matsko, 2012; Matsko & Hammerness, in preparation). We found that the specific source of coherence in these three programs is a particular kind of vision, which Zumwalt (1989) has termed “curricular vision.” This curricular vision provides teachers with an understanding of what to teach and why it is important for their students; of their role as teachers in a particular classroom with its community context; and of the needs, strengths, and backgrounds of their students. Furthermore, this curricular vision is embedded in and informed by particular socio-cultural and/or religious contexts and purposes for education.

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


5. In order to have a comparable sample of teachers from the three programs, we interviewed DeLeT and UTEP teachers after they completed their first year as teachers of record (taking under consideration the fact that they already taught one year as interns) and ACE teachers after they completed two years as teachers of record (ACE does not include an internship year).

6. Miles and Huberman (1984) employed this method, which was also adopted by Johnson and colleagues (2004), Olsen and Anderson (2007), and others to analyze and develop rich portraits of the lives of public school teachers.

7. One additional UTEP teacher has also been teaching, but in order to retain his anonymity, details regarding his work setting were titled “other.”

8. We use pseudonyms for teachers and schools to protect teachers’ anonymity.

9. It should be noted that a year after these interviews with ACE teachers, we visited the ACE program, interviewed faculty and leaders, and collected program documents and course syllabi. We found some evidence that ACE was aware of the need to prepare culturally responsive teachers and has tried to address it through the program’s curriculum. See also a recent study by a member of ACE’s faculty, which advocates the need for Catholic teachers to adopt cultural responsive pedagogy (Dallavis, 2011).
10. It should be noted that CTT teachers mismatch with the *novice oriented* professional culture is probably related to the fact that our sample included only two charter school teachers.

11. I do not imply here that all schools offered similar working conditions to CTT teachers. As shown earlier, teachers from UTEP and particularly from ACE were far more exposed to harsh school environments, which resulted in the transition of all ACE teachers from their initial placements.

**References**


### APPENDIX 1

#### CTT PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ACE</th>
<th>DeLeT</th>
<th>UTEP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Founding</strong></td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Size/grade</strong></td>
<td>200 per cohort; K-12</td>
<td>20-25 per cohort; K-6</td>
<td>20 per cohort; K-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Length</strong></td>
<td>Summer + 2 academic years</td>
<td>14 months</td>
<td>2.5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structure</strong></td>
<td>Summer 1: classes, tutoring</td>
<td>Summer 1: classes, practicum</td>
<td>Yr 1: classes, field work, tutoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yr 1: teachers of record, living in community, retreats, distant courses</td>
<td>Yr 1: internship</td>
<td>Yr 2: classes, teach aid, internship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summer 2: classes</td>
<td>Summer 2: classes</td>
<td>Summer: classes, teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yr 2: teachers of record, living in community, retreats, distant courses</td>
<td>Post-program: induction</td>
<td>Post-program: induction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Degree/License</strong></td>
<td>M. Ed. State certification</td>
<td>MAT State certification</td>
<td>MAT State certification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School context</strong></td>
<td>Under-resourced Catholic schools; southern U.S.</td>
<td>Urban &amp; suburban JDSs; mainly northeast</td>
<td>Urban public schools; Chicago</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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