

## **Choosing To Stay, Choosing To Leave: New York City Teaching Fellows after Two Years**

**By Arthur T. Costigan**

### **Perspectives**

Over the last three decades, the educational research community has come to see that the process of becoming a teacher is situated autobiographically in the context of peoples' lives (Costigan & Crocco, 2004; Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996; Hubermann, 1993; Levin, 2003). The use of narrative and ethnographic methodology has become central to understanding how new teachers come to understand themselves as teachers, become socialized into the profession, and come to understand the teaching craft (Zeichner, Tabachnik, & Densmore, 1987). Increasingly, attention has been paid to the narratives teachers create in their early years, in order to better understand the patterns of thinking by which they begin to develop as teachers (Clark, 2001; Costigan, 2004; Rust, 1999). Put simply, *who* teachers are, what they think, how they feel, the patterns of how they develop (Hollingsworth, 1989), as well as their shifting centers of foci and attention (Rust & Orland, 2001), matter a great deal in understanding how teachers come to identify with, and become socialized into, teaching.

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This research is also situated in the political reality of a scarcity of teachers, one that is particularly acute in poor, urban school systems. Educational researchers have come to see that the teacher turnover is actually an exodus of certified teachers and that quality of life issues may be a contributing factor in most new teachers leaving within two years of beginning teaching (AACTE, 2002; Voke, 2002; Ingersoll, 2002). There is some evidence that this exodus is caused by the intensification (Hargreaves, 2000) of the teaching profession caused by increased accountability and high-stakes testing. Nearly 50 percent of teachers are leaving the profession in their first few years of teaching because of what might be called quality-of-life issues (Park, 2003) which include poor working conditions, lack of autonomy in teaching (Claycomb, 2002), limited input into school decision-making (Gordon, 2003), increased accountability, and high-stakes testing (Costigan & Crocco, 2004; Wright, 2002).

This study focuses on three new teachers, Arnie, Andrea, and Frank, who are New York City Teaching Fellows (NYCTF), a program of alternative teacher recruitment and certification that is in its third year at a urban public college in New York City. This study focuses on just three of the Fellows in order to have a more intense look into the thinking of new teachers who have made a commitment to teach in poor urban schools for two years and who are now choosing to remain urban teachers, to leave to teach in the wealthier suburbs, or to leave teaching altogether. The narratives of Arnie, Andrea, and Frank are grounded in three years of continuing research, using interviews and group discussions with a cohort of Fellows to attempt to understand the patterns of thinking of new teachers who are enrolled in a program of rapid certification through full-time teaching and reduced educational coursework (Costigan, 2004).

### **Methodology and Data Sources**

Research began in Summer 2001, when two investigators and several research assistants located at a public university focused on 38 Fellows who were enrolled in the same education classes and who were assigned to teach literacy programs in elementary and middle schools in adjacent neighborhoods of New York City. These neighborhoods contained many housing projects inhabited primarily by African Americans, as well as by Caribbean and South American immigrants. These areas have high incidences of poverty, crime, gang violence, and drug abuse. Over the summer and the first year, two principal researchers and two research assistants regularly read the daily journals of these 38 Fellows, which contained both guided entries about teaching, and unguided diary entries about their on-going experiences. The researchers noted themes, or “process codes” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992), common in the journals, and over their first year of the participants’ teaching they conducted nine hour-long individual interviews with Fellows whose journals were considered particularly rich in emerging themes. Following methodology used by

Costigan (2004) and Rust (1999), we additionally used five hour-long “brown bag” discussions with five to seven Fellows during the first two semesters of full-time teaching. A total of 25 different Fellows participated, in groups of four to six, over the series of brown bag discussions.

In the second year, 12 interviews of roughly one hour were conducted with second year Fellows. Emerging understandings, themes and issues relevant to these Fellows were discussed in a two-hour group discussion to find if the researchers’ emerging understandings were trustworthy (Ely, et al, 1991). Further research was conducted from the spring to fall of 2003 through an additional seven interviews. As the Fellows neared the end of their commitment to the program, this research focused on three Fellows whose narratives were particularly rich in themes found among the original participants in the study.

This research is grounded in an understanding that teaching is an autobiographical process that is best understood through the narratives new teachers create as they struggle with a job that is a complex intermingling of personal autobiography and an emerging understanding of the teaching craft. Such an understanding must come to terms with the external realities of contemporary highly stressful urban teaching environments (Clark, 2001; Costigan & Crocco, 2004; Clandinin & Connelly, 1996; Holt-Reynolds, 1992; Huberman, 1993; Levin, 2003). This autobiographical and narrative understanding is at odds with the politicized market-driven understanding of teaching that is frequently present in alternative programs, and that tends to see teaching as a set of correct behaviors to pass on facts and skills to students. This focus measures educational reform by test scores, and not only devalues teachers’ personal initiative and creativity, but intensifies and depersonalizes the profession by forcing teachers into externally imposed teaching behaviors that ignore the complex and the autobiographical contexts of teacher development (Hargreaves, 2000; Mitchell, 2003).

In all of the conversations with the Fellows, the researchers found that the Fellows were very willing to talk openly, and that group discussions and interviews allowed for an opportunity for the Fellows to talk without constraint. This openness gave access to what Clandinin and Connelly (1996) call “secret stories,” the knowledge in the less-than-public sphere of what teachers actually do, and think about, in their practice. The researchers came to understand that this sharing revealed their feelings and understandings beyond the type of public discourse that is allowed within the political and ideological environments of professional teaching or college coursework (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996).

To best present this on-going research, seven interviews were held in the spring, summer and fall of 2003 with three Fellows whose journals and conversations had been particularly rich in themes. Presenting the narratives of Arnie, Andrea and Frank allows a more in-depth and personal insight into the thought processes of a group of people who have left careers in business and industry to teach in troubled urban schools that were officially labeled “hard to staff.” There are

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three reasons for narrowing and deepening a focus into these Fellows. First, each was interviewed dozens of times over three years, and these participants presented clear articulation of themes found in almost all of the original participants studied. Second, these three participants were used as member check by which we could test the trustworthiness of emerging understandings of the Fellows' experiences (Ely, et al., 1991). Last, focusing on the narratives derived from a few participants allowed us to focus with more depth on particular narratives representative of the larger group of participants. Put succinctly, focusing on Arnie, Andrea and Frank allows this research to present a more coherent narrative of new teachers as they face an important juncture in their teaching careers.

Arnie, Andrea, and Frank are all in their late twenties. They are literacy teachers in the fourth to seventh grades. Arnie and Andrea describe themselves as coming from white collar or professional backgrounds in suburbs near New York City. Frank describes himself as coming from a poor rural background in the Midwest. They all took education coursework at a local public college in an urban residential area of the city. Arnie is not in an educational program associated with the principal investigator of this research, but Andrea and Frank were in several courses with the principal investigator, though all narratives included in this paper were conducted after these participants had graduated from the academic portion of the NYCTF program. Arnie will probably teach in the city for another year; Frank will remain for at least one year; and Andrea has left for a teaching position in the suburbs. All three of the Fellows presented in this program have been successful students and are highly regarded by supervisors in the NYCTF program, and by administrators in their schools.

### **Situating the Fellows**

#### ***Background***

Currently there are 45 states with alternative means to teacher certification, 25 of which are structured programs like the Fellows (Blair, 2003). Many of these programs, such as the NYCTF program, are based on the Teach For America (TFA) model that achieved prominence during the Clinton presidency. This mode typically involves some kind of intensive "boot camp" summer workshop (Lucadamo, 2002), a commitment to teach for a minimum of two years, some kind of financial incentive such as a sign-on bonus or a free master's program, as well as matriculation into a shortened university-based teacher preparation program. Currently, all but six states and territories of the United States have some kind of formal alternative-route preparation program in place to recruit, train, and certify teachers (Blair, 2003).

After a careful application process which involved intensive interviews and teaching a sample lesson, as well as careful reviews of the candidates' academic backgrounds and employment histories, all the Fellows entered a program which

involved (1) participation in an intensive summer program that included course-work, student teaching, mentoring and test preparation, (2) full-time teaching for a contracted two-year period starting in the following fall, and (3) matriculation into an alternative, free, two-year 36-credit master's program leading to full certification (Resource Guide, 2001).

By April 4, 2003, 62% of the 323 Fellows who began in the summer of 2000, and 74% of the 1096 Fellows who began in the summer of 2001 were still teaching (Duncan-Poitier/State Education Department, 2003). Although the program formally asks for only a two-year commitment, Fellows are allowed to take three years to complete their master's degree, and must teach a total of four years to gain permanent state certification

An on-going, on-line, voluntary exit survey of 75 Fellows who had chosen to withdraw from the program before their two-year formal commitment had ended (Office of Alternative Certification, 2003) reveals that most Fellows were relatively happy with the program, reported high degrees of collegiality with other new teachers, and felt they were getting adequate support. Indeed, they reported that the chief reasons for choosing to withdraw from the program were "student discipline problems" (50%) and "lack of student motivation" (29%). Roughly 20% to 30% of respondents also reported "lack of teacher influence on school policy," "unsafe environments," and "[low] quality of school leadership." Of those who had left the program, 19.4% were looking for another job in "teaching," and 80.6% were looking for "something other than teaching" (Office of Alternative Certification, 2003). The survey did not ask directly about the influences of high-stakes testing, increased accountability, and lack of curricular and classroom autonomy.

While in the first year of teaching, however, many Fellows expressed frustration with a curriculum in their schools that was increasingly driven by high-stakes testing, test preparation, and scripted lessons. The first year of teaching is often chaotic (Rust, 1996), but after the first year, when new teachers have begun to understand the rhythms of the school year (Clandinin & Connelly, 1986), they frequently begin to pay attention to other factors that influence them to stay in or leave the profession (Costigan, 2004; Rust & Orland, 2001). Overwhelmingly, the Fellows reported that they had built strong relationships with their students, but that their attempts to come to a meaningful teaching practice was severely hindered by the current authoritarian culture of schooling, increasingly driven by high-stakes testing, increased accountability, and mandated curricula (Anagnostopoulos, 2003). They felt that the test-preparation curriculum that they were mandated to teach was particularly inadequate in serving a significant minority of students who they felt were unprepared for traditional schooling. They felt that this situation had intensified (Hargreaves, 2000) their teaching experience to the degree that leaving the profession was a realistic option.

Arnie, Andrea, and Frank noted that there was an irony that they were among the most highly regarded teachers in their schools, but were constantly monitored,

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supervised, and forced to teach in ways they thought were contrary to the ways in which they wanted to develop. Learning to teach is a complex developmental process which involves many competencies and domains, ranging from acquiring professional knowledge, to an ability to forge personal relationships with students, to a developing knowledge of one's self. Conceiving of teaching as a complex developmental "learning profession" stands in contrast to the attempts at standardized, test-based, and behavioral reforms (Costigan & Crocco, 2004; Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999; Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996; Hargreaves, 2000).

Arnie, who began in the summer of 2001, explains why the Fellows remain teaching in the city for four years before deciding to leave for the suburbs:

From my impression, people are waiting to complete their master's degree and then they're going to make their move. They're more focused [in their second year] on getting out of their assigned school, as if saying, "At least it's a change of scenery." Our commitment to the Fellows program is two years, but almost immediately they found they really needed to take three years to get a masters. Others are [typically] saying, "Once I can get my masters I can focus on [going to] the suburbs"—or wherever they want to go. The Fellows that I know are wrapping up their masters and getting tenure in the [NY State] system, [saying,] "Do the four years so you have your tenure"—you get tenure after three years—"Step foot in the door and punch in on the first day of your fourth year and then you have your tenure."

Arnie is "on the fence" and is not sure he wants to stay in teaching for a third year. He is intermittently looking at want ads for jobs in his former profession as a business administrator. He states that the constant administrative flux in his school, as well as the school's inability to deal consistently with disruptive or unprepared students, leads him to strongly consider leaving teaching.

Andrea has left teaching in the city for a wealthier suburb where she grew up. Yet, she will work there part-time for less money than in her city job and on a non-tenure track line with no job security. She relates that she is taking this job because the position allows her the freedom to continue to develop a teaching practice without the accountability pressures in her former urban school.

Frank will teach for another year in the city and is open to the possibility of leaving the city with his wife. Frank has been troubled by having to teach scripted "teacher proof" lessons for the past two years, and he is very much concerned about a lack of autonomy in further mandated curriculum changes which have been the subject of staff development meetings and which are detailed in a CD ROM delivered to all teachers. If his third year of teaching continues to demand a "lock step, test prep" curriculum, he sees leaving for another school district as a real possibility.

To differing degrees, Arnie, Andrea, and Frank clearly articulate four issues which they see as central in order to remain teaching in the city, issues which all of the Fellows to some degree have articulated over two years of full-time teaching. These issues include the negative attitudes about schooling of some students, a

general lack of autonomy due to high-stakes testing and increased accountability, an inability to see urban teaching as a situation which fosters professional growth, and the strength of the bonds they have developed with their students.

## Themes in the New Teachers' Thinking

### *Culture and Continuity*

As Arnie plans to continue to teach in the city while keeping his options open for returning to a job in business administration, he explains his ongoing frustrations by recalling a meeting between the Fellows and the New York City School Chancellor:

And [at a meeting] we let the Chancellor have it. And he came in and said, "Who's the most important person in the school?" And he obviously wanted us to say, "The principal!" But we let him have it. Most said, "No, the Dean or whoever's in charge of discipline." And then we started telling him these tales, you know [saying,] "We've got these kids who are out of control, and really are—a minority are—destroying the schools, because there is no effective means of handling them." And he at least acknowledged what he was hearing, and maybe noted the fact that any educational reforms have to be backed with stricter discipline—and blah, blah, blah. And I looked at him and said [to myself], "I know what *that* means. He'll say something to somebody [lower in the hierarchy] and eventually it will come down the pike and finally get interpreted to, 'The teacher has to handle it—*again!*'"

A consistent theme in talking to the Fellows was the fact that their schools were located in areas of public housing and poverty, areas where the local culture of gang and drug violence was reflected inside the schools' hallways and classrooms. A minority of students who were disengaged from education, or verbally and physically disruptive, were a serious problem for almost all of the Fellows who participated in this study. A school environment which consistently contains disruptive or non-cooperative students is a feature unique to schools in the United States (Ingersoll, 2003).

Arnie acknowledges, however, that the problem is a lack of ethos (Grant, 1988) or a shared vision about creating an educational environment.

The chief issue that's turning me off is frankly that it's about half the kids. . . . And the problem is that the school system can't handle them. The power of the school system to set meaningful limits and work with these students—and/or demand accountability from the parents for their children's behavior—was gutted years ago. And then you call the parents and you get indifference. . . . or a father who says when you call, "What's my kid done *now?*" And the father basically said, "He's the same at home. We can't handle him either." And you sit and go and say, "Maybe we should all sit together and find out what's wrong with the child." And I do my bit, you know, do the paperwork, push, push, push. Get the kid into whatever program he needs. And [in the school] they admit, "This kid should be in a separate

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classroom with more one on one instruction,” all this other stuff. And the parents just ignore that recommendation . . . and veteran teachers of 16 or 17 years experience agree. There’s nothing they can do.

Arnie feels that the hierarchical structures in place blame the teachers for students being unable to meet their cultural expectations for learning. Andrea explains that she has developed a strong relationship with her students, but that the culture of the local community is not able to meet the values of traditional academic culture, even as she is sympathetic with the economic and working situation of the students’ families.

You know, the school was kind of bleak, and you feel bleak leaving after two years. Is it the kids themselves? No. I loved the kids. I had no problems with any of my students, overall. . . . Yet, there was lack of support. What I feel has to happen beyond the classroom is a support system. . . . You know, I was fortunate to have a great dean. But one great dean can’t act alone and save the school. There were so many “holes.” With discipline, for instance, when you did need some type of backup, it wasn’t there, or the deans were so overwhelmed with issues and problems, that you know better than to take it to them. I feel like parental involvement is another “hole.” Their parents are working around the clock, and are not home, and are not *able* to be home, so the problems go beyond just the parents sitting and watching TV all night. They have so much to do. But essentially what that removes is a portion of the support system that a teacher needs to lean on. And a child needs to see that there is some kind of a unified front between staff at the school and parents. And the kids who sense that, and the kids whose parents teach that, those kids are probably more successful, compared to those kids who don’t have that kind of support.

Arnie is more judgmental of the home community, but acknowledges that the American Dream simply is not a viable option for the parents of his students.

I mean, someone said, “How do you go and tell a community that you’re not raising your kids right?” Because it’s also a set of community values that doesn’t value education. Because there’s hopelessness and [the parents] saying, “Don’t get anyone’s hopes up. Don’t dash anyone’s dreams, because, you know, that’s happened to us. You lied to us. Why should we let that happen to our kids?”

Like many teachers, these three Fellows have little intimate understanding of the home culture of their urban students. Yet the dissatisfaction with, and misunderstanding of, students’ home cultures may be more complex than “simply blaming the students” or “abdicating responsibility” (Anagnostopoulos, 2003, p. 312), but caused also by a complex shielding and coping mechanisms on the part of teachers due to increased accountability and severely diminished power and autonomy to teach as they think best. With the Fellows, moreover, it seems clear that neither the school situation, nor the Fellows program, nor the college coursework has made a sufficient attempt to allow the mostly middle class and White Fellows bridge the gap of cultural understandings with their poor urban students.



**Accountability and Autonomy**

Arnie explains he had a “pretty bad experience” his past year and is not sure if he has “what it takes to go the long hall with this.” He explains that one of the problems is the constant shifting of teachers and administrators from school to school, and the current trend of firing administrators who do not show improvements through test scores.

Part of staying in teaching depends on waiting to see where I get reassigned for the coming school year. And part of me is that there are so many problems with the school system right now, especially the fact that it’s basically that the top management is in disarray. Our principal is one of 50 who got fired, and I was just appalled because, in my background in management, they went about everything just totally the wrong way. And it rippled out, had a horrible effect, on the school, the teachers, and eventually on the kids.

Arnie, Andrea, and Frank, like many of the Fellows, are seen both by themselves and by administrators as excellent beginning teachers, and typically the Fellows are teachers whose classes are continually observed and monitored by official visitors from the city’s bureaucracy. Of all three Fellows in this study, Arnie is the least affected by having to teach scripted lessons and has no problem “tweaking” mandated curricula, even when visitors are present.

Almost every time I was teaching there was someone standing in the back of the room watching my teaching, because I had, you know, one of the “showcase rooms” and was one of the teachers [about] who[m] the principal said, “Go to his room,” because it was like, “He knows how to teach a lesson, and he’s usually got the kids working.” So they left me alone. As for the new curriculum: I never [physically] received it! [Laughs.] Because we started hearing about balanced literacy and I said, “I was taught about it [in university courses].” And as for scripted programs, I basically looked at it and changed it to base it on my instincts. Because I thought that the kids should be reading every day and they should be writing every day, and the scripted programs didn’t make that happen, so I made it happen. And they were comfortable with that. And they saw results. . . . So I did a lot with music and dancing, and acting. Because I believe that they need to be out of their seats, and I got praised for things like teaching them to write musicals and plays and do drama . . . but that wasn’t in the scripted program.

Frank is committed to remaining a teacher, and will remain teaching in the city for at least one more year, stating, “I didn’t know this two years ago, but I will *always* be a teacher. I think I will always be teaching in this area, but I don’t know how long I will be teaching in the city.” Yet Frank’s two years of teaching have been problematic. On the one hand, according to his school’s test scores, he is the leading literacy teacher. On the other hand, the practices that have led his students to significant improvements are not those required by the administration.

This year, I don’t know, my test scores came back from the ELA [English Language Arts] test and my results were—well, my kids out performed everyone

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else in the school. I mean significantly! Why do I think that happened? I think it is because I didn't do only what they said to do. I mean there were test preps that happened [in my class] but they happened in context of other things. And, in reading books that the kids choose, that I found ways to work into my lessons ways that would be reflected on the tests, and we did more—so much writing, and so many projects and we used portfolios. And if I had done just the scripted program that they had given me, I don't think it would have been the same result. I mean the kids *worked*. They came in on Saturdays. They came in until the end [of the semester] for it. . . . And I took a lot of heat throughout the year for not doing everything as given to me. . . . And now the principal has removed all of the other eighth grade teachers, except for me, and they've all been teaching for 20 years. And she's going to give me the top honors classes, so I'm going to be set up that way for the next year. But there're some catches coming with that, like this prescribed curriculum which is coming. They're doing the balanced literacy format, and I don't know.

Like Arnie and Andrea, Frank experienced a particular lack of privacy and autonomy in his classroom.

I was observed formally seven times, which is bordering on harassment. And I was rated satisfactory each time. But they wanted documentation that "I'm not using the program." *Not using the program!* This was in every [lesson] write up. And they came in informally, I'd say, a good solid 25 time on top of that. They brought the district office in to watch. It was just constant, constant. . . . And it was a huge struggle.

Frank explains a paradox in his prospects for teaching next year. Despite having the highest test scores in the school, he will still have to teach an even stricter scripted curriculum and there will be increased observations from the district office.

I am now "The Favorite." Before, no one listened to me at staff meetings, and you know, the things that I was trying to do. I would really have to come in with research in hand and say, "This is why I'm doing this." And even then it still was questioning and doubting and being checked up on, and now, they want me to interview some of the people they're hiring, because they want people to have the approaches I have and want people more like me! [Yet,] some of the incredibly successful things I've done this year do not fit into their format. You know, we're doing these community service projects and creating these portfolios. They have field logs, they like write a mini thesis. And it doesn't fit into the "read aloud" format. It doesn't work like that. So many things that I do don't work like that. And, you know, I asked the principal, "Do these honor classes give me the freedom then to not have to read aloud to them?" Because they don't need it. They don't want it. . . . And the principal said, "No! You have to read aloud, because of [sigh] the restructuring of the Regents' [exams]. People are in big power plays because they have to justify why their jobs are in place . . . and all I know is that the woman [administrator] who is coming in to enforce this format is going to enforce it." And [the principal] said, "Just do yourself a favor and read aloud, even if you don't think you should."

Despite his great success, both in developing a curriculum of inquiry that he sees as beneficial, and in raising test scores, Frank fears what is coming next year.

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I'm still not trusted. . . . I really don't see myself doing well next year, and I have a feeling that by next spring, I'm going to start sniffing around to find something else. Because I am very good at teaching. I didn't know that before. With a year of being resilient doing what I wanted to do, despite harassment, I discovered I am very good at this. But not being allowed to do what I want is not O.K.

High-stakes testing and increased accountability are factors in all public teachers' lives, even those in wealthy districts. Yet, the lack of autonomy is particularly acute in poor urban areas of New York, where mandated curricula and scripted lessons have become the norm. The NYCTF program seeks to recruit talented people with strong academic backgrounds and a high vocational commitment to teach, yet the reality of the situation seriously diminishes these new teachers' ability to develop a personally rewarding teaching practice. This lack of autonomy has a direct impact on their prediction that urban teaching may not be a place where they can engage in any meaningful professional growth.

***Professional Growth and Autobiography***

New teachers are aware that teaching in the United States is both a low status and a high stress profession (Ingersoll, 2003). Choosing a teaching career may be at odds not only with contemporary cultural values, but with the opinions and values of family and friends (Costigan & Crocco, 2004). Indeed, new teachers are aware that they are engaged in an autobiographical transformation which affects their entire lives and that their "teaching life" is situated and assessed as part of the larger context of a their "lived life" (Cook-Sather, 2001). The various aspects of teaching, such as dealing with students from different cultures and working under monitored conditions of great accountability, are not only isolated professional concerns, but are part of a person's assessment of opportunities for professional growth and personal fulfillment.

Increasingly, the educational research community has come to see that developing as a teacher is a life-long process which is intimately involved in the autobiographical understandings of those who choose to teach (Huberman, 1993; Levin, 2003). This process begins with the vocational leap it takes to choose to become a teacher and is particularly intense in the first few years when new teachers choose to commit to the professional life of teaching (Costigan, 2004; Rust 1999; Rust & Orland 2001). Issues such as autonomy and accountability, or the characteristics of a particular student population, are important issues for new teachers in their own right, but these issues cannot be isolated from the on-going decision to remain in a low-status, difficult, and highly intensified profession (Hargreaves, 2000). Teaching in poor, urban areas puts even more pressure on new teachers, and the current reality of mandated and scripted curricula, with the attendant lack of autonomy, is assessed by new teachers in light of possibilities for professional growth and personal fulfillment.

Like the majority of the Fellows, Andrea came into the teaching profession

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with high ideals and a strong commitment to becoming a teacher. Yet, the lack of autonomy in her daily teaching practice has led her to reconsider how able she will be to develop as a teacher. Andrea has accepted a part-time teaching position in the wealthier suburbs in order to develop her practice, or in her words, “to narrow it down. I feel like I could test out and explore my developing practice and methods that I have started to think about in a way that I don’t think I can in the city.” Like Arnie and Frank, Andrea was one of the “star” teachers, but she lacked ownership of the curriculum and her own classroom and was even forced to arrange her students’ desks in a certain way:

I think that what happened was that last year it was very structured in the way they made us do balanced literacy, and I had observers in all the time, and it was hard for me to fit in and test around constant observation. There was a school mentor coming in three days a week, and we also had the college supervisor coming in. And then we had the observations which had to be performed by the assistant principal. And there were several times I had the district office where they would just pop in and say, “Oh, you need to change the desks. You need to teach in certain ways, and you need to place the board here and you need to change the room around.” And then they came back two days later to see that I did it! So rules like that really turned me off. I couldn’t develop in my own teaching life in my own way.

This experience is in clear contrast to her impressions when she revisited her old high school for an initial interview. On her first interview, she saw evidence of constructivist, student-centered teaching, approaches to teaching which Andrea would like to develop for herself:

I thought there were some good signs when I went in to do my demonstration lesson and the English teacher had on the board, “Self assessments due on Monday.” And I thought, “Hmmm, that’s interesting.” . . . And I noticed that the head of my English department is a member of NCTE [National Council of Teachers of English]. And then I went through the entire [interview] process, and I got to speak to Mr. Delano, the English teacher, and he graduated from [a local progressive teacher education program] and [is] a huge fan of reader response and process writing. So all of this stuff started coming together . . . how my life would be less stressful in such a more positive environment.

Andrea feels that the suburbs are the place where she can best develop a rewarding teaching practice. Like Andrea, Arnie ultimately situates teaching in an autobiographical context:

You know, I don’t wonder why more teachers have heart attacks or go home with migraines, or go home and pour themselves a stiff drink. You have to wonder if this is the way you want to live your life.

To Andrea and the other Fellows in this study who have made a thoughtful leap to become teachers (Costigan, 2004), the decision to remain teaching is understood in light of the perceived possibilities for professional growth. This

perception is, in turn, situated in the larger context of how the teachers can envision living their lives.

### **Students and Relationship**

In talking to the Fellows over their two years of teaching, the researchers noted what was for them a discontinuity. While the Fellows typically reported that they always have difficulty with a handful of students (Costigan, 2004), they also reported that they had generally developed strong ties with their students. Moreover, these emotional and personal ties were a chief reason to remain teaching in the city. Even the disruptive students were a part of this affective bond. As one Fellow put it, "Love the kid, hate the kid's behavior." Andrea speaks of a her guilt at leaving her students to teach in the suburbs.

I loved every kid in this particular school. And if there was anything that held me, made me think twice about leaving, it was the culture of the school which was multi-, multi-, *multicultural*. The kids were great. And I felt that that enriched my classroom immeasurably. I really did. And it's not a small degree of guilt that asks, "Am I selling out to do this?" You know, [I ask,] "What was my original intention?" Umm . . . I'm still reflecting on that, as far as the choices I had to make.

Frank also contrasts his frustration with a mandated curriculum with the way this interferes with his developing of a teaching practice that is personally gratifying and which seems to be rewarding for his students. As with most Fellows who want to stay in teaching, the relationship with students is a primary factor.

When I first started teaching, I worried about how to handle the students. But it's never been the students. My frustration is never the students. I love the students. I want to help the students. They're *good*. They're smart. They just are not where "they" want them to be. The students are very connected to me. They are never why I would not want to teach anymore. And that's the saddest thing you've ever heard. The reason you don't want to teach anymore is *not* the students. It has nothing to do with teaching. Isn't that absurd?

Frank reflects a strand in the Fellows thinking, namely that the current reality of high-stakes testing and increased accountability does not take into account that a significant factor for teachers to remain in the profession is their relationships with their students.

### **Discussion**

Arnie, Andrea, and Frank articulate four themes which are present in the participants who have for three years been part of this study and who are now faced with making a personal and vocational decision. First, they perceive a lack of continuity between their academic expectations and the perceived lack of academic investment in school culture of a number of their students. Second, this discontinuity is exacerbated by being held accountable to standardized curricula which

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inhibits the freedom to negotiate both a meaningful teaching practice and a curriculum they see as beneficial for their students. Third, a lack of autonomy negatively influences the kind of vision for professional growth in urban settings that predicts a fulfilling professional and personal life. Last, the importance of personal relationships with their students inclines these teachers to want to remain teaching in difficult situations, and then induces guilt at abandoning those relationships for other professional possibilities.

While Arnie, Andrea, and Frank sympathize to varying degrees with the perceived difficult home lives of their students, they have become perplexed and distressed about a minority of students who seem not to value and want not to participate in the academic or school culture. This research does not focus specifically on the issues involved with a White middle-class population teaching an increasingly diverse student population (see Wideen, et al., 1998); rather, the experiences of Arnie, Andrea, and Frank point out that such a discontinuity in academic cultural expectations needs to be brought more into the conversation of alternatively certified teachers (Anagnostopoulos, 2003; Costigan & Crocco, 2004). These three Fellows express frustration at the many disruptive, disengaged, or non compliant students, and they acknowledge that school, district, and citywide authorities do not know what to do either. This ambivalence and uncertainty is exacerbated by various mandated standardized test preparation curricula that make it much more difficult to personalize teaching and learning for students who come from different backgrounds and with different values than these new teachers. An inherent irony in this situation is that most states such as New York have increasingly mandated diversity themes in education, but it seems as if the rapidity of immersion into full-time teaching and the reduced coursework of alternative programs may actually interfere with preparation in how to deal with students' different cultural attitudes towards schooling.

While issues of accountability and autonomy are, in themselves, an increasingly significant strand of education research (Costigan & Crocco, 2004; Hargreaves, 2000; Ingersoll, 2003), this study indicates that there is a link between new teachers' experience of an accountability-driven curriculum and the way they predict possibilities for their professional growth as teachers. As the Fellows have entered the profession with a profound sense of taking an autobiographical leap into a new profession, as well as entering the program with high aspirations and even noble ideals about teaching (Costigan, 2004), such professional considerations are situated in the context of larger autobiographical understanding of new teachers. Unfortunately, whether Arnie, Andrea, and Frank remain teaching in the city, leave for wealthier districts, or leave teaching altogether, they have come to understand that the academic culture of urban schools is profoundly at odds with their emerging understanding of what is good teaching, what is in their students' best interests, and what leads to a fulfilling professional life.

Lastly, while these new teachers do have difficulty understanding the cultural

attitudes of a body of their students, it is the quality of the personal relationships they develop with their students that leads them to stay teaching in difficult settings, and even to feel a sense of betrayal towards their students when they feel they must choose to leave for personal and professional reasons. These personal, relational and emotional ties, what Frank calls “love,” are perhaps the most neglected aspects of alternative programs such as the Fellows. Perhaps, too, schools of education avoid such personal, emotional, and “mushy” attachments as being unworthy of professionals. Nevertheless, Arnie, Andrea and Frank express very strongly a strand of thinking in most of the Fellows in this study: It is the relationships they develop with their students that leads them to stay teaching in urban settings and cause them serious pangs of regret when they leave.

While an evaluation of the NYCTF program is beyond the scope of this study, it is important to note that alternative programs such as the Fellows have become so common as to have now become *traditional* alternative routes to certification (Mitchell, 2003). These new alternative programs that feature reduced coursework and a quick means to full certification are based on a behaviorist and mechanistic understanding of teaching, where teaching is seen as a set of learned behaviors to impart information (Clark & Yinger, 1987). These programs do not have the specified objective of valuing the personal and autobiographical transformation it takes to become a teacher (Cook-Sather, 2001). These programs do not concern themselves with any consideration of why people become teachers, how they develop as teachers, and how their experiences lead them to commit to or disengage from teaching. Given that new teachers continue to leave the profession at an alarming rate (Ingersoll, 2002), and that alternative programs lose new teachers at a rate equal to, or greater than, traditional programs (Duncan-Poitier, 2003), it is worth paying attention to the words of new teachers like Arnie, Andrea and Frank to see what insights their narratives can give to the ways individuals think about teaching as a profession as well as what influences their choice to remain teaching in urban schools, or to leave.

Unfortunately, these personal, relational and autobiographical considerations currently have no place in the supply- and market-driven philosophy of alternative programs based on the TFA model. Research also suggests that teacher quality is the essential factor in student learning and that such quality is determined not only by the innate strength of personal characteristics, but by the quality of teacher education received (Darling-Hammond, 2000). In order for Arnie, Andrea and Frank to build on the passion they brought to the program, they require more assistance to develop a gratifying practice in an intensified urban educational world (Fried, 1995)—or, as Andrea put it succinctly, “I need room where I can make mistakes.”

Given the fact that these Fellows chose to leave good jobs in business and industry because of a passion to teach in problematic urban schools, it does not seem too difficult a task to assist them in sustaining the passion with which they entered into the profession. This requires, however, that alternative programs, school

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authorities, and college coursework address the lived experiences and the personal thinking process of these new teachers as they engage in the first few years of teaching. Yet, this involves a radical shift to pay acute attention to the thinking processes and feelings and emerging understandings of new teachers. It remains to be seen to what extent alternative programs, school administrative systems, and schools of education will seek to do so.

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