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# Visionaries, Reformers, Saviors, and Opportunists: Visions and Metaphors for Teaching in the Urban Schools

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## Abstract

This qualitative study investigated the visions and metaphors for teaching held by teacher candidates enrolled in an urban-based alternative certification program. While late-entry teacher recruits are considered to have high motivations for urban school teaching, few studies explore the nature of these motivations. Findings from this study uncovered four orientations concerning teaching in urban schools: visionaries, reformers, saviors, and opportunists. While visionaries and reformers appear to be a stronger fit for urban contexts, saviors and opportunists expressed deficit views of students or cared little about building relationships with urban youth. Implications for supporting new urban teachers are discussed.

## Keywords

teachers, teacher development, leadership

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Urban school administrators struggle every year to recruit qualified teachers needed for their classrooms. Indeed, urban districts face a “revolving door” phenomena, in which new teacher recruits often leave the district within three to five years (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004; Ingersoll, 2001). Researchers offer a variety of explanations as to why beginning teachers leave. Zumwalt and Craig (2005) listed reasons such as pursuing another career, seeking higher pay or better benefits, childbearing, and being dissatisfied with teaching. Johnson, Berg, and Donaldson (2005) reported that schools with larger minority populations, in high poverty areas, and with a history of lower academic success tended to experience teacher turnover at rates as high as 25%. Loeb, Darling-Hammond, and Luczak (2005) pinpointed issues in the context of high-needs urban schools. They characterized many of these schools as having large class sizes, a lack of textbook or technology resources, a scarcity of quality professional development and low levels of parental involvement. Despite these challenges, several researchers have discovered that the successful urban teacher possesses a strong commitment to teaching in the urban schools and with culturally diverse students (Brunetti, 2006; Haberman, 1996; Nieto, 2005; Stanford, 2001).

Where can urban school leaders find potentially successful teachers for their urban classrooms? One avenue for such recruitment, alternative certification programs (ACPs), have become a necessary tool in meeting the staffing needs of many school districts (Ng, 2003). Teacher candidates from ACPs tend to be older, more culturally diverse, from the urban community, and have prior life or work experiences that may aid in their development as a teacher (Haberman, 1996; Natriello & Zumwalt, 1993; Ng, 2003; Zumwalt & Craig, 2005). ACP teacher recruits are seen as being more confident (Resta, Huling, & Rainwater, 2001; Rodriguez & Sjostrom, 1998) and holding more realistic views of teaching (Manos & Kasambira, 1998). Several scholars stress that nontraditional teaching candidates and career changers oftentimes have life and work skills that provide immediate benefits for the classroom (Chambers, 2002; Mayotte, 2003). Finally, researchers suggest that ACP candidates hold strong intrinsic motivations for teaching (Dieterich & Panton, 1996; Lerner & Zittleman, 2002; Natriello & Zumwalt, 1993; Tamir, 2009). However, much has yet to be learned about the motivations of many ACP teacher candidates for teaching in urban schools. In fact, Humphrey and Wechsler (2007) found that ACP teacher candidates had varying motivations for teaching, with some seeking teaching as a long term career and others only wanting to teach as a temporary job option or to increase occupational benefits, such as income and work stability and health benefits. Given the range of motivations held by teacher candidates, urban schools, teacher

educators and school leaders need ways to learn more about the motivations and potential needs of their teacher candidates as they prepare to teach in urban classrooms.

The purpose of this article is to investigate the visions and metaphors for teaching in urban schools expressed by teacher candidates enrolled in an urban-based ACP prior to beginning their first year of teaching. Addressing these visions and metaphors will allow access into the dispositions and views about urban schools and contexts that teacher candidates bring into the classroom, an important but often overlooked aspect of teacher recruitment and teacher education (Talbert-Johnson, 2006).

## **Visions and Metaphors for Teaching in the Urban Schools**

Karen Hammerness (2006) defined a teaching vision as “a set of vivid and concrete images of practice” (p. 1). Such visions for teaching often contain a variety of images about what a classroom should look like and draws from the prior educational experiences of each person (Lortie, 1975). Teaching visions present “images of ideal classroom practice for which teachers strive” (Hammerness, 2001, p. 143). Exploring the teaching visions held by teachers can reveal the motivations, educational philosophies, and perspectives about teaching and learning that inform a teacher’s classroom practices (Squires & Bliss, 2004). Simply put, teaching visions incorporate the ways in which novice teachers envision what teaching should or ought to look like in the classroom.

Teaching visions can offer a way to “help us develop a deeper understanding of how teachers feel about their teaching, their students and their school; how much they challenge their students and themselves; and even of their commitment to the profession” (Hammerness, 2001, p. 144). For novice teachers, teaching visions provide a way for teachers to develop a teacher identity (Feiman-Nemser & Remillard, 1996; Rosaen & Florio-Ruane, 2008). These visions often indicate beliefs that teachers hold, which have a powerful influence on their teaching practices (Pajares, 1992; Richardson, 1996). According to Hammerness (2001), teaching visions encompass three dimensions: focus, range, and distance. The focus of a vision is defined by the component or aspect of teaching expressed in the vision. Range refers to the scope of the vision—whether it is broad or narrow, spanning communities beyond school or only focusing on specific classroom and student interactions. The distance of a vision indicates how close or distant the person is from actualizing her or his vision for teaching in everyday practice. These dimensions clarify how teacher visions inform thinking about teaching.

In addition to teaching visions, teachers often adopt metaphorical language when describing their conceptions of teaching (Martinez, Saulea, & Huber, 2001; Seferoğlu, Korkmazgil, & Ölçü, 2009). Metaphors for teaching and learning range from teaching as guiding, modeling, and telling (Alger, 2009) to a teacher as policeman, tailor, cook, parent, tourist guide, and orchestra director (Seferoğlu, et al., 2009). Although research on beginning teachers depict the struggle between the ideal visions for teaching and the reality of the public school classroom (Bullough & Knowles, 1990; Fuller, 1969; Lortie, 1975; Ryan, 1986), metaphors for teaching “play an important role in gaining insight into school people’s thinking and reasoning about teaching and learning” (Saban, 2010, p. 291). Indeed, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) demonstrated that “metaphors may create realities for us, especially social realities” (p. 156). Such metaphors suggest a set of concrete images of ideal classroom practices. This article proposes to use both teaching visions and metaphorical language to help investigate the varied motivations of future urban school teachers.

Before proceeding, however, we must acknowledge the influence of popular images about urban school classrooms and teaching, especially as found in films. Grant (2002) asserted that preservice teachers with little personal experiences teaching in urban schools “rely on images in popular culture for information about worlds different from their own” (p. 78). Unfortunately, urban schools are mostly depicted as dangerous places with unmotivated students and filled with internal strife and neighborhood decay. In these popular images, teachers are setup as lone heroes in a battle to restore order and education for urban youth (Scull & Peltier, 2007). These portrayals reinforce cultural myths that good teaching should come easily and that one teacher in isolation can affect the entire system of education for a school (Britzman, 1986). Gilbert (1997) found that images about urban schools and teachers held by preservice teachers mirrored trends in the popular media. Participants saw teachers as “heroines and heroes in a war against a dangerous urban environment” (p. 92) and students as “self-determining perpetrators of violence, often directed at schools and teachers” (p. 92). These images may influence the ways in which teachers construct their visions for teaching in the urban schools.

Visions and metaphors for teaching capture values, dispositions, and beliefs held by teachers about students and the role of public education. While Richardson and Placier (2001) reported that beliefs are highly resistant to change and often shape how teachers respond to opportunities for future professional development, teachers’ dispositions, values, and practices in the classroom do change as a part of a natural process of teacher development (Borko & Putnam, 1996; Carter & Doyle, 1996; Munby, Russell, & Martin, 2001). Costigan (2004) suggested that the initial ideas and metaphors

expressed by beginning teachers were not the “long-established, common-sense, and well-worn images and archetypes of teachers’ work which would remain consistent and resistant to change in teachers’ early years” (p. 133). Instead, these early conceptions of teaching provide starting points from which to frame new educative experiences (Hammerness, 2003; Rosaen & Florio-Ruane, 2008). Therefore, identifying incoming visions and metaphors of new urban teachers can assist school leaders and teacher educators in supporting their professional growth and development in the urban classroom.

## Method

Participants in this qualitative study included urban teacher candidates enrolled in an ACP that was sponsored by a large urban school district in the Southwest. In cooperation with a local university, this ACP program provided rigorous graduate-level coursework for its teacher candidates prior to their first year of teaching. During the teaching year, participants also received extensive mentoring and coursework designed to support them during their induction process. The program recruited mostly career changers as well recent college graduates. The admissions criteria required all participants to have a minimum of a bachelor’s degree with a 2.5 overall grade point average and a series of related content coursework. Upon completion of the ACP, participants were generally expected to take teaching positions in the urban area.

Thirteen participants were recruited in the spring prior to beginning their first year of teaching. Participants included 9 second career teachers and 4 recent college graduates, 9 females and 4 males, and 6 prospective elementary teachers and 7 prospective secondary teachers. The sample included 7 Anglo-Americans, 4 African Americans, 1 Latino, and 1 Asian American (see Table 1). All participants were currently enrolled in their first semester of the teacher education program.

Data collection occurred in two stages: first a focus group with all participants and then one follow-up interview with each participant. The focus group lasted about two hours long and focused on identifying the key motivators for becoming a teacher. During the focus group, the researcher led participants through a process known as affinity clustering, whereby group members brainstormed thoughts they associated with choosing teaching as a career and wrote these thoughts on index cards. The index cards were taped to a wall for all group members to see. With the help of the researcher, the group members organized the cards into clusters (Northcutt & McCoy, 2004). For example, one cluster was labeled, *inspiration*; this cluster contained cards related to being inspired to teach by others and wanting to

**Table 1.** Participant Characteristics

	Dominant metaphorical language usage	Demographic information (estimated age, ethnicity, and gender)	Grade-level certification sought <sup>a</sup>	Prior occupation
Angela	Savior	30, Anglo-American female	EC-4	Artist
Barbara	Savior	47, Anglo-American female	EC-4	Computer marketing
Becky	Opportunist	40, Anglo-American female	4-8	Foster mother
Bessie	Visionary	25, African American female	4-8	Cashier, recent college graduate
Brad	Reformer	30, Anglo-American male	EC-4	Actor
Gloria	Visionary	30, African American female	4-8	Clerical worker
Halle	Reformer	23, African American female	EC-12, Special Education	Recent college graduate, bank teller
Ken	Visionary	43, Anglo-American male	4-8	Military
Lisa	Opportunist	25, Anglo-American female	EC-4	Advertising coordinator
Lorraine	Reformer	26, Anglo-American female	4-8	Apartment manager
Nam	Reformer	26, Korean male	EC-4	Recent college graduate
Oscar	Opportunist	23, Peruvian male	4-8	Recent college graduate
Patti	Savior	29, African American female	4-8	Box office ticketing manager

a. Grade levels included Early Childhood (EC) to fourth grade and fourth grade to eighth grade.

inspire others—both serving as motivators for wanting to teach in the public schools. The focus group identified clusters, such as career advancement, lifelong learning, societal contributions, time for self and family, and working with youth, as main motivators for choosing teaching.

The researcher used the clusters or categories identified in the focus group to construct the interview protocol for the follow-up interviews (Morgan, 1997; Northcutt & McCoy, 2004). The follow-up interviews, which lasted roughly one hour, attempted to gain insights about each person's prior experiences with teaching, motivation to teach, and views on transitioning into the field of teaching. During the interview, participants revealed their conceptions of teaching and their visions for teaching in the urban schools.

Data from the focus group and interviews were audio-recorded. Immediately following the focus group, the researcher constructed extensive notes about the focus group process and findings. Interviews were transcribed for later data analysis. Data analysis involved a constant-comparative method (Boeije, 2002; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Pidgeon & Henwood, 2004). First, the researcher coded the data, focusing primarily on the interview transcripts. Initial coding attempted to illuminate participants' visions of teaching in the urban schools, paying attention to comments on ideal teaching practices, views on the urban schools, and conceptions of urban children and families. These codes were then transferred into a matrix to help organize the data associated with each initial category, identify additional codes, and begin the process of finding patterns and themes across the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In the process of constructing themes, the researcher combed the transcripts for confirming and/or disconfirming statements about the themes so as to increase the rigor of the findings. Finally, because findings centered on metaphorical language, special attention was placed on the language used by participants to describe their visions of urban teaching. In the coding of the data, transcripts were combed for instances when participants used metaphorical language or implied metaphors in their speaking and visualizing of classroom practice or urban school contexts (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

A few limitations affect the impact of this study. First, with only a focus group and subsequent interview, few opportunities for triangulation across multiple data sources, such as observations and other documentation collection, affect the rigor and generalizability of this study. Second, because this study did not follow participants into their first year of teaching, the researcher could not ascertain the ways in which teacher visions and metaphors about urban teaching influenced the experience of teaching in the urban schools or informed the later retention and success of the participants. Finally, a larger sample size would have provided greater exploration of the use of visions and metaphorical language employed by teacher candidates in the urban-based alternative teacher education program.

## Findings

Findings from this study revealed four orientations adopted by participants to describe their motivations for teaching in an urban school. These orientations suggest a set of particular teaching visions and metaphors that participants rely upon to inform their notions of urban school teaching. Participants fell into one of four dominant categories: visionaries, reformers, saviors, and opportunists. Each of these categories represents a certain kind of language used by participants when describing their future teaching practices, views on urban schools, and conceptions of urban children and families (see Table 2). Although participants may have expressed language and ideas from more than one category, all participants exhibited dominance in one of these categories.

### *Visionaries*

Visionaries were drawn to teaching as a way of contributing to society or improving the world. Three participants (Bessie, Ken, and Gloria) fell squarely into this category; Brad, a reformer, also expressed visionary ideals. These individuals used metaphors such as “contributing to the team,” “paying it forward,” “giving back to the community,” and “ants on a hill.” Visionaries saw themselves as part of a movement to improve the world; being a teacher in the urban schools was their avenue to contribute to the community at large. Two major aspects of visionary language included seeing a relationship between working in schools with contributing to society and adopting community-centric or team approaches to describe teaching.

First, visionaries drew a connection between their work as teachers in the urban schools and the betterment of society. Bessie summarized this notion when she said,

Watching your students learn and giving them a piece or pieces of your knowledge. I think that is a contribution to society. I think that enhances society, because you never know what kind of students you may have. You [might] have the next president, the next top doctor. Teaching students is a contribution to society because they bring so much to the world.

Bessie’s comments demonstrate how visionaries envision a link between their classroom practices, the success of their students, and the future impact that their students will make on others. The goals of visionary teaching are



**Table 2.** Metaphors and Visions for Urban Teaching

	Views of schools	Views of students	Role of teacher	Metaphors about teaching
Visionaries	Urban schools as communities, families, or neighborhood	Students as community members or partners	Contribute to community	“Pay it forward” “Contributing to the team” “Giving back to the community” “Ants on a hill”
Reformers	Urban schools as failing children, parents, and community	Students as recipients of the services schools render	Take accountability for reforming and fixing ills of school system; lobbying for system change	“System is broken” “Needs to be fixed” “Needs update” “Kids really need a boost”
Saviors	Urban schools as either a safe refuge from students’ home environments or as a dangerous place needing teachers to “rescue” students from	Students as vulnerable, “at-risk,” or victimized by their environment Frames students in terms of deficits	Be a hero, save children before “it is too late,” and fight against the environment where students come from	“Healing the world” “Reaching out” “God has brought these youth to my doorstep” Kids as “suffering” “Save the children”
Opportunists	Urban schools as an easy way to secure a stable job, perhaps as stepping stone to a better career	Students as a by-product of the job teaching	Perform the technical tasks of teaching	“I want medical insurance” “a done deal [easy job to get]” “dual career”

broad and long-range in nature. An underlining metaphor of teaching as a chain or network of contribution occurs in much of the visionary language. For example, Gloria stated, “Reach one, teach one. The more you reach, the more you teach, and it continues. The whole pay it forward scenario.” By drawing on the “pay it forward” concept, Gloria reiterates how the chain or network of contribution starts with the relationship formed between the classroom teacher and the students. A key component here is that the teacher must see students as essential in this chain or network. Ken, for example described this vision,

You [the student] are relying on me [the teacher] to help you get through this class and learn what you need to learn. Later on, I am going to rely on you to contribute to society, to help us out, to find what your purpose is. I am going to help you try to uncover what your purpose is.

These teachers viewed urban school students as partners in this chain or network of contributions. Their visions for teaching included more than just teaching knowledge, but also life skills, such as to “uncover what your purpose is,” expressed by Ken, and inspiration to become contributing members of society.

Second, visionaries often use community-centric or team approaches to describe teaching. For example, Brad employed an “ants on the hill” metaphor to describe teaching and the public schools:

It’s like ants building a hill. Everyone has their job. Everyone needs to make an impact and everyone can have an impact. That is a very strong reason for me wanting to be a teacher. I know it’s going to be, I’m going to feel like I am serving a purpose in a big way, because even if you are going to inspire one kid, then you [have] contributed to society.

This metaphor suggests that schools ought to run like communities and that parents, teachers, and students all have important roles to play for the good of society. Likewise, Gloria related her vision for teaching based on a community-oriented model. Gloria recalled her relationships with neighborhood kids and family members as models for teaching. She explained

We are the neighborhood house so to speak. We always have a lot of kids [her children’s friends] at our house. And it’s, “Miss Gloria?” asking me questions about different things. And I was like, I could do this. I think I could work with kids everyday.

In addition to working with neighborhood children, Gloria also described working with teenage girls in her extended family through informal groups she called Girl’s Groups. “It would be like my cousins [at first] and all of sudden they would invite a friend . . . It kind of grew that so many times a year I’d have at least 15 girls at the house for the weekend.” Through these Girl’s Groups, Gloria counseled youth about issues they were facing and acted as a role model. These experiences reinforced the idea that the process of teaching was community-driven.

While Gloria’s notion of teaching in the public schools was greatly informed by interacting with neighborhood and familial groups, Ken likened teaching to his experiences serving in the United States Army. Just prior to registering for the ACP, Ken had served as a sergeant in the military. In this capacity, he trained and mentored younger recruits assigned to his platoon. He reflected,

When I am in front of my troops, I want to be the leader. I want them all to be on my team. I want everybody to be on my team because I don’t want the glory. I just want a team where we can trust each other, where we can depend on each other.

Ken viewed teaching in the urban schools in the same way. He defined teaching as “all about being a team. It is all about the kids.” He described his role as teaching life lessons and fostering positive attitudes. Like a military leader, he envisioned the urban classroom as a place to create “a challenging classroom and restore order and get some kind of focus going on.” For him, all missions needed a purpose or focus; he wanted to help students “uncover their purpose.”

Visionaries see teaching as making an impact beyond the walls of the classroom. They see their daily interactions in the urban schools as part of a chain or network of contributions. Visionaries position students as partners and contributors to society. As a teaching vision, visionary teaching holds a broad scope or range, placing classroom teaching within the bigger picture of societal contribution. In addition, distance in visionary teaching is usually long term, in which teachers will realize their aims of improving society over many years.

## **Reformers**

Unlike visionaries, reformers are more concerned with improving the quality of education in the public schools rather than contributing to society in general. Four participants (Brad, Nam, Lorraine, and Halle) exhibited reformer language. These individuals viewed the urban schools as failing children, parents, and the community. Reformers expressed a fix-it mentality, wanting to fix the problems they saw in public education. They believed that by entering in the teaching profession they could affect the appropriate reforms needed to turn schools around. These reformers oftentimes held unmotivated teachers and educational policies as responsible for the quality of urban education.

A fix-it mentality permeated the ideas and language of reformers, recalling images of the educational system as being “broken” and needing to be “fixed.” For example, Nam stated, “Education needs to update itself to keep up with the outside world . . . Whoever wants to be a teacher should be aware of that.” Lorraine suggested that a “new person [who is] not drained and tired” can come in as a teacher and improve the quality of education for students. In these statements, new teachers take on the role of fixing the problems in the schools. The call for reform for many of these individuals was a motivating factor to teach in the urban schools. Halle, for instance, discussed her thoughts after visiting several urban schools, “I just didn’t like some of the things I saw. I was like, ‘Wow, who can change this?’ It’s going to take a lot more than one person . . . so I want to be a part in that.” Like Halle, Brad felt that in his role as a teacher, he was also an activist reformer. He imagined

himself lobbying on behalf of education, coming to elected representatives to change the situation. He would say, “You know what? I’m in the classroom. This [policy] isn’t working. Do something; we are electing you to do it. You got to fix it.” The fix-it reform mentality positions schools as not functioning properly. Whether the reasons are “drained and tired” teachers (Lorraine), standardized tests and curriculum policies (Brad, Halle), or a lack of critical thinking in the teaching curriculum (Nam), teachers needed to advocate for such reforms, which might include needing to “convince other educators out there” of the problem (Nam), “lobby some committee” (Brad), or “change some of the laws that are there” (Halle).

In addition to the fix-it mentality, reformers also tended to see classroom teachers and instructional practices as responsible for the failings of the public schools. For example, after observing a middle school where students appeared to be unmotivated, Lorraine attributed the lack of student motivation to the way their teachers cared for them and the attitude they possess:

Just the whole thing of caring. I think the attitude [of the teacher], it will change the attitude of the kids. Because just one week that I went to a school [to observe a classroom] and you see the attitude around with adults in the area and the kids and it’s just—you affect them in so many ways, and you don’t realize it. You can see the attitude in the kids and in the teachers. It’s like they’re [students] are going to portray what you’re in there [doing].

While some may have pinpointed the students or their family contexts as reasons for not being motivated, reformers, like Lorraine here, placed the burden to inspire and reach students on the teacher. In a similar way, Halle described how she began tutoring her younger cousin, a high school student, in mathematics. Halle viewed her cousin as capable and attributed her cousin’s failure to her teachers “just kind of giving up on her.” Her cousin began getting A’s on tests and assignments; Halle concluded that the teacher’s low expectations were the root causes for her cousin’s initial lack of interest in mathematics. Brad and Nam also felt that improved teaching and instruction were essential to reforming the urban schools. Nam felt that classroom instruction was too rigid and did not stress critical thinking skills, wanting more time for reflective thinking. Brad lamented on the poor teaching of unqualified teachers, stating, “I find one of the most disgusting things of looking back on my education as a kid were coaches who were just conveniently put in the classroom.” To him, a quality teacher was paramount to urban school reform. Brad commented that urban school kids “spend more

time [with the teacher] than they spend with their own parents.” Reformers attributed the schools, especially a teacher’s beliefs and practices, to the success or failure of students in the urban schools.

Like visionary teaching, reformers see teaching in broad terms—reforming the entire educational system. However, the reform teaching vision is slightly narrower in scope. Also, in terms of distance, participants might be able to realize some of these aims, but not without the help of others or through activist means. In the metaphor that positions schools as “broken” and teachers as the “repair persons,” students are seen more as recipients of the services that schools render. For example, Halle said, “Especially working in urban schools those kids really need a boost . . . So I get a chance to do that for somebody . . . to give them that extra boost.” Here the students receive that “extra boost” that comes from the teachers’ efforts. Even when Nam described teaching difficult high school students, he envisioned the student as being able to interact with the teacher after the teacher has reached them: “Once you [teacher] get used to them and show them how much you understand them, they’ll come around to you with their hearts open.” Brad agreed with this thinking, saying “There’s some kids in their entire lives, if you don’t make it fun or interesting, they will never get it [learn]. Period . . . they’ll get it, if you take the extra time to do it.” Reformers attribute much to the public school system and to the ways in which teachers teach their classrooms.

## *Saviors*

Saviors were drawn to teaching because of a deeply felt connection to the children in the urban schools. Three participants (Angela, Barbara, and Patti) took on a savior vision for teaching. Aspects of savior language can be found in statements by Halle, Brad, and Lorraine (reformers) and in comments made by Becky and Lisa (opportunists). Individuals subscribing to a savior vision for teaching saw themselves as saving the children, who they viewed as victims of their environment or surroundings. Metaphors such as “healing the world,” “reaching out,” “God has brought these youths to my doorstep,” and kids as “suffering” occur in the transcripts of these individuals. Several participants, while asserting their desire to “save the children,” often exhibited deficit thinking about urban neighborhoods and contexts. Saviors believed that they alone could rescue children from their impoverished state.

First, savior language positions urban students as vulnerable, “at-risk,” or as victimized by their environment. In several of the descriptions, participants suggested that it may be too late to teach older children, who have

already been contaminated by their toxic environment. Lorraine, for example, described her visit to an urban middle school,

It was very sad. I mean we had drug busts and fights and a crazy kid that went and shattered one of the windows in the assistant principal's office, and the police came and arrested her. . . . It scared me. It was like, what am I getting into, a war zone or what?

Lorraine painted a horrid picture of the urban school, casting students as being victimized by a "war zone" atmosphere. For this reason, Lorraine wanted to teach younger children. In addition to potentially dangerous school environments, Angela worried about the family and home life of urban children. Angela worried that, "There's too many kids that suffer unnecessarily." Angela believed that urban children are often ignored by adults and others in their surroundings. She described the home life of urban children as equally chaotic and unstable,

It seems like kids today may as well have the street knowledge of someone that's been around the block twenty times. I really didn't grow up that way . . . . Now it's just like things are out of control style and I don't think I have the background knowledge or the skills to deal with older kids. Now the younger kids, to me, they are still at least manageable. So, like I said, they hopefully are not at the point where the kids are really totally out of control.

Again, the notion that saviors have to "save" younger kids before it is too late emerges in the statements of these saviors. For saviors, good teachers struggle to provide a sense of harmony and order, despite the influences of the children's environment. Becky referred to this process of saving urban children as a "battle for boundaries" in which kids have "little discipline and some of them having serious issues not being addressed." In this "fight," Becky believed that the good teachers needed to persevere no matter the outcome, saying "It doesn't really matter specifically with a particular kid if you win or lose; it is that you stayed in the fight and tried." These views of the urban school mirror much of the images of the urban classroom found in films and other media.

Savior language used by participants positioned the teacher as a savior, hero, or heroine. For example, Barbara described herself as a "healer," seeking teaching as "a way of *my* healing the world one person at a time." In this statement, the use of "my" suggests that Barbara feels that she alone can heal

the emotional wounds of the students in her urban classroom. She elaborated, "I want to do [teach] the children that are at-risk . . . I want to get them back in the classroom. I want to get them over where they're stuck." Patti also saw her role as instrumental in saving urban children from disruptive home environments. Patti, who saw going into teaching as a way to pursue a later career in psychological counseling, believed that the teacher should act as a "bridge" between school and children's emotional well-being and "things going on at home." She imagined that the school could be "a shelter in the sense of, say, if things are not the way they like it to be at home or not the way they would like things to be in their lives." The teacher "can be an outlet or a shelter for them." In this way, Patti readily adopted a vision of her sheltering youth from their environment. Likewise, Becky drew on her experience as a foster parent to demonstrate her unique abilities and skills. She confirmed that "working with foster kids and CPS [child protective services], I have had many, many, many hours of training of working with special needs kids and stuff like that." These experiences would enable her to help urban youth in ways others could not. "I think a lot of people don't have that viewpoint [her view of working with children]." Although Becky sought teaching for mostly economic reasons, she communicated confidence in her ability to save children.

Saviors placed a heavy responsibility on teachers to support students in the urban schools; however, saviors saw the children's home and environment as causes for their underachievement. In addition, savior language—like some aspects of deficit thinking—suggested psychological deficits among students. While visionaries viewed students as partners in a chain or network of contribution along with teachers, saviors saw students as wounded, vulnerable, victimized, or trapped with teachers as their rescuers. A savior vision for teaching in the urban schools is narrow in scope, focusing on the perceived needs of particular students. This vision for urban teaching is centered on the immediate day-to-day interactions, rather than on long-range goals or plans for contributing to society or the public schools in general. Saviors communicate a strong sense of confidence in their abilities to save children.

### *Opportunists*

Opportunists viewed teaching in the urban schools from an economic or benefits standpoint. While nearly all participants communicated some form of opportunistic language, three participants (Becky, Lisa, Oscar) were dominant in their use of opportunistic language and ideas. Barbara and Angela (saviors) also communicated opportunistic language. An opportunist is someone who sees the urban schools with its constant need for teachers

as an opportunity to secure a stable job or work environment. Unlike the other visions and metaphors already discussed, opportunists often hold shallow images for teaching.

Opportunists were driven to the profession of teaching for economic reasons, mostly outside traditional intrinsic benefits commonly associated with teaching. For example, Lisa freely admitted, "I'm not going to lie and say that I feel like I was inspired to become a teacher. I think a lot of it was for selfish reasons." Lisa, having earned a degree in marketing had trouble finding a job that offered decent income, benefits, and vacation. Likewise, Barbara, who had been laid off from a computer industry position after 23 years in the field, stated "part of the reason I'm going into teaching is because I want medical insurance." For Barbara, as she grew older, she feared she would not be able to afford healthcare. Becky also had trouble looking for a stable job. Having spent several years as a foster mother and caregiver for Child Protective Services, she realized that she and her husband needed additional income. Having borrowed \$14,000 from her parents, she wanted to pursue a job that was "guaranteed" stable income and salary. She explained her rationale for choosing teaching,

I mean, with teaching, it is pretty much a done deal [easy job to get]. The urban district needs teachers up the whatever, every single year. If I keep going and keep going [to interview at different schools], I will eventually get hired somewhere.

Opportunists envisioned the urban school as an easy avenue for acquiring a stable income with appropriate benefits. One benefit reported by Oscar, a recent college graduate from Peru who immigrated to the United States in order to secure a position as a bilingual education teacher, was his ability to obtain a work visa. Once in the United States, Oscar wanted to explore other economic options. He commented, "A personal motivation is actually having a dual career." He explained that he would teach for one to four years and use this experience to pursue a business venture. Choosing to become a teacher provided him entrance into the United States and access to various experiences he felt would assist him in his future career aspirations. Even Angela (savior) stressed the importance of achieving financial stability through pursuing a teaching career. She said the "lack of work stability in my past really drove me crazy . . . I don't want to even say living pay check to pay check because you didn't know when a pay check was going to come." She reported that becoming a teacher would allow her opportunities to continue her art work in the summer and, like Oscar, pursue a dual career. While other motivations



might have informed the thinking of these individuals, these participants pursued a transition into teaching for its economic rewards.

Two opportunists, Oscar and Lisa, equated the urban schools with only acquiring economic benefits and saw students more as by-products of the work environment, simply tools to deal with. For example, while Oscar preferred to work with Latino urban youth, he related wanting to work with older students because he felt younger kids would be too demanding to work with. Lisa also stated that she “would love to work with little children. I’ve always been good with kids; I just never thought I’d want to teach.” For both of these participants, working with youth were secondary considerations for pursuing teaching as a career. As a result, these participants made very few comments about urban children or youth.

The language of the opportunist is the least concerned with community or global contributions and the most immediate in its scope. Opportunists want to acquire a stable working position as quickly and easily as possible. While opportunists may be highly motivated to acquire a teaching position, the center of their motivations lies outside the realm of the teaching and working with youth.

## Discussion and Implications

The findings from this study suggest that uncovering a teacher’s intrinsic or extrinsic motivations may not provide the kinds of insights about a teacher’s motivations, ideal teaching practices, and views of urban children and communities needed to determine the professional growth needs of that individual. Instead, teacher visions and metaphors can offer a more in-depth way of thinking about prospective urban teachers.

First, the scope, range, and distance of the teaching vision and metaphor can help determine how the candidate may frame her or his potential experience as an urban educator. Research studies on successful urban teachers demonstrate that teachers relied on strong commitments to teaching and drew satisfaction from creating meaningful relationships with urban youth (Brunetti, 2006; Nieto, 2005; Stanford, 2001). Teachers who adopt teaching visions and metaphors that are broader, community-centric and long term in nature maintain a “reach” (Hammerness, 2001) or goal to strive for. Visionaries, for example, saw the act of teaching as part of global process, a chain or network of contributions. Visionary teachers constructed deeper meaning into their future classroom interactions with students and instructional practices, seeing teaching as connected to a larger and more important bigger picture. Reformers, like visionaries, also held a broad view of teaching, but focused

specifically on improving the educational system found in the urban schools. Reformers recognized the need to build relationships with others outside of the school context as a way to advocate for changes in policies and practices affecting urban classrooms. Like visionaries, reformers connected their own classroom practices to a greater goal, that of urban education reform. Unlike visionaries and reformers, the scope, range, and distance of saviors was much more limited and immediate; these individuals believed they would be lone heroes in rescuing children from dysfunctional contexts. Finally, opportunists clearly had the most immediate goals for teaching—to acquire a job. Saviors and opportunists held no long-term, sustaining vision for successful teaching in the urban schools.

Second, the ways in which teacher candidates envision the role of students can reveal whether or not these prospective teachers hold a disposition that will foster meaningful classroom relationships (Talbert-Johnson, 2006). Talbert-Johnson (2006) noted that “it is also imperative that candidates possess positive dispositions that affirm all students, as students respond favorably to this type of relationship” (p. 156). Visionaries, for example, place the student in the role of partner or collaborator or neighbor within the context of the chain or network of contributions. This orientation of seeing urban children immediately classifies them as capable, able, and important, which is in stark contrast to the savior’s vision of children as victims, vulnerable, and trapped. Visionary language imagines both teacher and student as peers in the greater quest to improve society, while saviors are the rescuers and children the rescued. Reformers, on the other hand, position urban students less as partners and more as recipients of the education provided by public schools. Like saviors, reformers place heavy burdens on the teachers and the schools. However, unlike saviors, reformers reach out to others in the community to make needed reforms. For reformers, schools, like any other government agency, offer services to its citizens, the recipients of these services. When schools fail to function, they must be reformed—sometimes through political and activist means. While both visionary and reformer metaphors for teaching may offer a sustainable purpose for teaching, only visionary language sees urban children as equals in fulfilling its purpose. However, as Brad illustrated in his “ants on a hill” metaphor, reformers can also adopt visionary language. Finally, opportunists who view students as by-products of the work environment have the least potential for establishing meaningful relationships with urban youth.

Teacher visions and metaphors can also suggest how prospective teachers might manage the constraints and limitations of resources they face during their initial years of teaching. Britzman (1986) warned that teachers who adopt the assumption that good teaching comes naturally and requires little

assistance from others may be quickly disillusioned and leave the profession. The idea that beginning teachers become isolated is well documented in the teacher induction literature (Hertzog, 2002; Johnson & The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers, 2004; Lortie, 1975). For beginning teachers asking colleagues for help can be a very significant strategy in overcoming challenges associated with teaching (Castro, Kelly & Shih, 2010; Hertzog, 2002). While visionary and reformer language both recognize the importance of working with others to achieve their aims and goals, saviors and opportunists tend to be less concerned with building such networks of support. The savior metaphor for teaching most closely resembles the popular notions of the teacher as a lone hero or heroine (Grant, 2002). Given the difficulty of learning to teach for ACP candidates, being a lone hero or heroine can spell potential disaster for new urban teachers. Opportunistic visions for urban teaching provide little evidence for sustaining an interest in quality teaching. Such individuals might be less willing to seek out professional development and support for others beyond basic classroom and instructional management.

Findings from this study suggest a series of implications for supporting new teachers for urban schools. Costigan (2005) asserted, “the educational research community has come to see that developing as a teacher is a lifelong process which is intimately involved in the autobiographic understandings of those who choose to teach” (p. 135). Teaching visions and metaphors can offer points of examination for assisting how new teachers frame and learn from the experience of teaching in urban schools. School leaders and teacher educators ought to focus on three major areas of concern for beginning teachers: negotiating personal and professional development, fostering communities of practice and support, and managing contexts and constraints.

First, a “reality shock,” or the realization that one’s idealized visions of classroom life and teaching may not represent reality, often affects beginning teachers. While initial orientations to teaching can “provide a sense of reach that inspires and motivates them [new teachers],” (Hammerness, 2003, p. 45), the gap between having and realizing teacher visions may cause the beginning teacher to lose faith in their ideals. Hammerness’s (2003) study of two beginning educators demonstrated how one teacher struggled with enacting her vision for the classroom given the context of her school, while the other teacher sustained her vision by progressing in smaller incremental steps. Thus, subscribing to visionary or reformer orientations may possibly lead these teachers to face disappointment and frustration at their inability to manifest these goals for their classroom immediately. The role of the teacher educator, school leader, or mentor teacher then must be to assist beginning

teachers in reflecting, reframing, and reinterpreting the ways in which new teachers see themselves, their development, and their practice. Carter and Doyle (1996) defined the means for becoming a teacher as “transforming an identity,” “adapting personal understandings and ideals to institutional realities,” and “deciding how to express oneself in classroom activity” (p. 139). Accessing the orientations held by new urban teachers can be a starting place for school leaders, teacher educators, and mentors for facilitating these three processes.

Visions and metaphors also serve as starting places for deeper investigation and reflection. According to Hammerness (2003), teacher educators and induction leaders must “elicit teachers’ lay knowledge to confront contradictions, challenge assumptions, and deepen knowledge, in turn laying the ground for more complex personal and theory-based professional knowledge” (p. 52). For applicants representing the language of saviors or opportunists, teacher educators and school leaders can help these teachers acquire deeper and more nuanced understandings of teaching as a profession. While visions and metaphors can initially frame the way that first year urban teachers consider their experiences in the classroom, learning from experience can occur “only through reflection—a process that is enhanced by dialogue” (Richardson & Placier, 2001, p. 909). In the mentoring conversations between new teachers and school leaders and teacher educators, visions and metaphors can become starting points for dialogue, because these orientations address how teachers frame their experience rather than attempt to alter long-standing beliefs, which are considered highly resistant to change (Richardson, 1996; Richardson & Placier, 2001; Raths, 2001). The act of reframing involves adapting one’s ideals to the reality of the teaching context (Carter & Doyle, 1996). Unfortunately, many ACPs fail to access these initial ideals and orientations as part of the teacher education and induction process (Costigan, 2004, 2005; Talbert-Johnson, 2006).

Second, urban school leaders and teacher educators ought to foster communities of practice, whereby new teachers engage in dialogue with experienced teachers and mentors about working in urban schools and with urban children. Teacher education researchers hold that learning to teach is a situated activity, occurring within specific contexts and requiring attention to the structures by which experiences are shaped given those contexts (Putnam & Borko, 2000; Rodgers & Scott, 2008). Rodgers and Scott (2008) stated that “identity is dependent upon the contexts in which we immerse ourselves: schools, teacher education programs, study groups, family, religious groups, political parties, and so forth” (p. 734). As a result, school leaders and teacher educators must “take on the responsibility to help novices become a part of a community of

practice,” or teacher learning communities centered on improving teaching (Rosaen & Florio-Ruane, 2008, p. 720). In these communities, novice teachers can reevaluate the metaphors and visions they adopt. Rosaen and Florio-Ruane (2008) proposed that teachers consider alternative metaphors, such as the metaphor of teachers as weavers where teachers construct layers and dimensions of experiences for students in the classroom, as well as make sense of their own learning as interwoven and layered. Establishing these communities of practice can provide beginning teachers valuable support systems and opportunities to reflect on their own orientations with regard to teaching in urban schools.

Finally, school leaders and teacher educators must work with beginning teachers to construct strategies and skills to manage the constraints that they may encounter as an urban teacher. Johnson and Birkeland (2003) reported that first year teachers who experienced some success towards meeting their goals as a classroom teacher and creating fulfilling relationships with students tended to stay as teachers. Unfortunately, urban schools are known for their difficult contexts and limited resources (Loeb et al., 2005). Sometimes teachers are denied the freedom to establish their own curricular choices (Costigan, 2005); other times teachers struggle with issues related to connecting with students and peers (Castro, Kelly & Shih, 2010; Kersaint, Lewis, Potter, & Meisels, 2007; McCann & Johannessen, 2004). Helping beginning teachers learn how to manage the constraints of the urban schools and form strategies to assist them in feeling some success toward achieving their visions for the classrooms or enacting their metaphors for teaching can be essential for the development and retention of new urban teachers (Hammerness, 2003; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003).

These three suggestions—helping beginning urban teachers reflect, reinterpret, and reframe how they see themselves, fostering a community of practice, and assisting new teachers to acquire skills and strategies for managing the constraints of urban teaching—all point to the larger process of “transforming an identity” (Carter & Doyle, 1996, p. 139), whereby novice teachers become a part of the urban school community. School leaders can facilitate the development of alternative teacher visions or metaphors for those new teachers who cling to savior and/or opportunist language by providing opportunities for reflection through mentorship, using metaphorical language or teacher visions as starting places to consider practice in teacher coaching conversations, and offering supportive environments focused on self-improvement and growth. Cultivating powerful urban educators requires a sustained effort on the part of school leaders, teacher educators, and community members.

In education, we often struggle between what is idealistic and what is realistic. As the demand for recruiting and retaining teachers for urban schools increases, we as school leaders and teacher educators might begin to feel the constraints of our own limited resources. Decisions about what we do with our time and resources, especially with respect to supporting new urban teachers, do not come easy. However, we must not lose sight of the need to encourage and develop qualified teachers for every student in our urban schools.

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## Bio

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