

**It's Hard to Go Back:  
Career Decisions of Second-stage Teacher Leaders**

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## INTRODUCTION

As large numbers of teachers retire, the teaching force is undergoing a transformation. Increasing evidence shows that many who enter teaching today are not satisfied with the unstaged career of teaching, show greater interest in taking on leadership roles outside their classroom (Berg, et al, 2005; Donaldson, 2005; Johnson and Birkeland, 2003), and are more likely than their predecessors to leave teaching for other professions after only a few years (Ingersoll and Smith, 2003; Luekens, et al., 2004). Women, who make up the majority of teachers, have many more career opportunities today than did their predecessors thirty years ago. Thus, much more than in the past, teaching now competes with other professions for the same candidates. Attracting and retaining this new generation of teachers poses a substantial challenge to districts around the country. Understanding how members of the entering generation of teachers decide whether to leave or stay in the classroom, and understanding how their motivations and aspirations parallel or diverge from those of their predecessors, may help schools evaluate current policies and practices or develop new ones for increasing teacher retention. This study investigates the possible influence of one district's leadership program on the career choices of second stage teachers over a number of years.

As the teaching force itself changes, roles and expectations for teachers are in transition as well. One development that may affect teachers' view of the career – and possibly their retention – is expanded opportunities for teacher leadership. Schools and districts increasingly call upon teachers to lead their peers in large-scale improvement efforts. Skilled, experienced teachers work in new roles as instructional coaches or staff developers with responsibilities that are different from both those of administrators and classroom teachers. How will these new roles affect teachers' experiences in and perceptions of the teaching career?

This study was designed to examine how teachers who have held leadership roles in one district describe their decisions about whether to leave or stay in classroom teaching after completing their terms as teacher leaders. Overall, teachers in this sample had a rewarding experience in the leadership role. Although some teachers briefly returned to classroom teaching roles as required by the program, within a few years, most participants had chosen to pursue further leadership roles that removed them entirely from the classroom. Their job choices were motivated by a desire to put into practice the expanded authority, expertise, and influence, which they had learned and valued while working as in the leadership role.

## BACKGROUND

Many factors influence a teacher's decision to leave or stay in her job as classroom teacher. For example, working conditions, compensation, job satisfaction, and external factors such as the desire to raise a family, are some of the considerations that teachers weigh when they consider career choices. Many in the retiring generation of teachers found job satisfaction and motivation within the context of their classroom. Teachers valued their autonomy and the "professional independence and discretion" of a teacher's work (Rosenholtz and Simpson, 1990). When they wanted greater influence, it was in regard to decisions that directly affected their work with students (McLaughlin and Yee, 1988, Rosenholtz and Simpson, 1990). When they wanted growth, they tended to switch subjects or grades but continued to carry out the same responsibilities of the classroom teacher (McLaughlin and Yee, 1988). Job descriptions remained relatively stable and comparable across the teaching force.

Opportunities for career development may also influence a teacher's job decisions. The teaching career has historically been "flat," with job responsibilities on the first day virtually the same as those on the last day. (Lortie, 1975) Unlike other professions, teachers

have traditionally not been given greater responsibility as they gain experience, knowledge, and skills. A “norm of egalitarianism” has long existed among teachers, whereby all teachers are seen to be equally skilled and knowledgeable (Johnson, 1990; Lortie, 1975). Even teachers’ pay and privilege are based on years of experience and accrued graduate credits rather than demonstrated expertise (Odden and Kelly, 2002). Within this reality of an unstaged career, teachers do not expect differentiation among peers. In fact, under these conditions, if a teacher seemed to claim greater expertise than her peers, she would be seen as suspect (Johnson, 1990; Lortie, 1975). Traditional markers of career development found in other professions – increased pay, promotion, status, supervisory authority, or decision-making authority – have not been available in a typical teaching career.

Recent studies suggest that what satisfies and sustains entering teachers today may be different than what did so for their counterparts thirty years ago. (Berg, et al, 2005; Donaldson, 2005; Johnson, et al, 2004) Teachers hired over the last decade show more interest in taking on leadership roles – and taking them on early in their careers – than did their predecessors. (Berg, et al, 2005; Donaldson, 2005; Donaldson, et al, forthcoming, Johnson, et al, 2004) After completing their first few years of teaching, typically characterized as survival years (Huberman, 1993), these teachers enter their “second-stage” of teaching, often seeking opportunities for influence and responsibility beyond the context of their own classroom teaching (Berg, et al, 2005; Donaldson, 2005; Johnson, et al, 2004; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). Many of these teachers have a short-term approach to teaching, entering to try it out for a few years before deciding whether to stay with it. (Donaldson, 2005; Johnson, et al, 2004; Peske, et al, 2001).

Expanded opportunities for leadership roles outside the classroom may be responsive to the career expectations of newer generations of teachers. These roles are not a new idea. In 1986, the Carnegie Commission on Teaching and the Economy report, *A*

*Nation Prepared*, called for Lead Teacher positions as a means of increasing the capacity of the school while providing a sense of career development for teachers. Recent NCLB requirements, however, have created a renewed sense of urgency to increase the skill level of many current teachers struggling to meet new teaching demands. Growing numbers of school systems address this through coaching and/or mentoring systems. To fill these positions, they often hire from within the teaching ranks, thus creating new teacher leadership roles. While the number of these roles available to classroom teachers has increased in recent decades (York-Barr and Duke, 2004), research on them has been limited and findings have been unclear. The most consistent finding regarding differentiated roles is their effect on the teacher leaders themselves, who tend to feel greater degrees of motivation and engagement in their work (Duke, 1994; Smylie, 1994). However, this research is now dated. At the same time, teachers in leadership roles often report that they experience uncomfortable relationships with peers as they assume their roles in a new hierarchy (Donaldson, et al, 2005; Duke, 1994; Little, 1988; Smylie, 1992). It is unclear how, if at all, teachers' experiences in these roles may lead them to remain in classroom teaching or to move to new positions outside of the classroom.

## CONTEXT

District and union leaders in Montgomery County, Maryland, one of the nation's largest districts, are striving to provide greater differentiation within the teaching career without instituting a career ladder that might lead teachers up and out of the classroom. In 2000, the district launched an ambitious, new school reform plan by introducing new roles for teacher leaders. One of these roles was Consulting Teacher, an integral part of the new Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) program.

The PAR Consulting Teacher program was designed so that teacher leaders would rotate in and out of these specialized roles. Skilled teachers temporarily left the classroom to

take district-level coaching positions and then, after a few years, returned to the classroom, while others took their place. The design was deliberate. Rather than create the first step in a career ladder that steadily drew expertise out of the classroom and into administration, the district wanted to ensure that participants returned to the “core” role in the district: classroom teaching. I investigated the experiences of those who participated in the role within their first decade of teaching. Known as “second stage teachers,” these teachers have made it through the first “survival” years of teaching (Huberman, 1993) and typically bring a higher level of expertise to their work than the does the novice teacher (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004; Murnane & Phillips, 1981; Rockoff, 2003). Since these teachers are at considerable risk of leaving the profession, I wanted to see how their experiences in the role did or did not influence their decisions to leave or stay in teaching.

#### *How the program works*

Consulting Teachers are highly-skilled, experienced teachers<sup>1</sup> who serve three-year terms as peer coaches for all beginning teachers and underperforming veteran teachers. As full-time coaches, Consulting Teachers (CTs) are assigned a caseload of approximately 13-18 teacher “clients” whom they observe and advise regularly so that they can meet district performance standards. CTs conduct at least three formal observations of each client and submit a written review of each observation to the district. In the spring, each CT reports to a PAR panel of teachers and administrators and reports whether the teachers in her caseload have met the standards and recommends whether each should be retained or dismissed. CTs in Montgomery County receive additional compensation in the role: a \$5,000 stipend for the additional 20 professional development days they complete each year and a \$5,000 stipend above and beyond their salary to compensate for the additional skills and expertise required of the role.

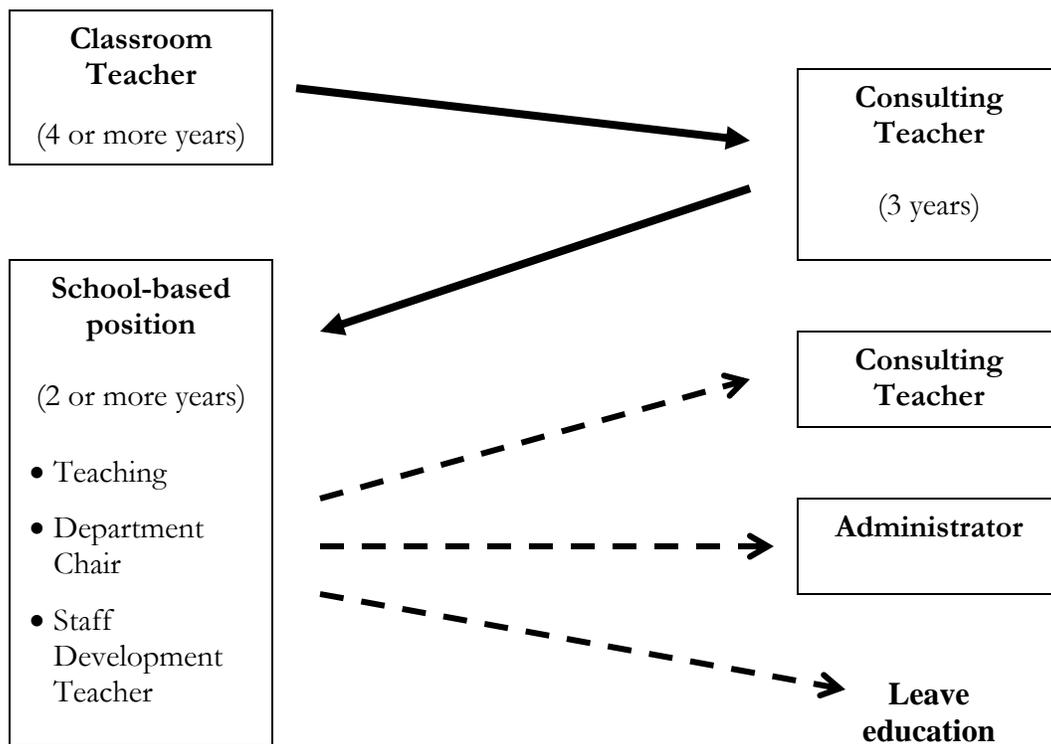
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<sup>1</sup> The district defines “experienced” as having at least 4 years of teaching experience.

In the original plan, CTs who had completed the three-year term, were required to return to classroom teaching positions for at least two years, after which they were free to pursue any job, including administration. Union leaders introduced this requirement for two reasons: to increase the chances that novice and underperforming veteran teachers would view CTs as peers rather than as superiors and thus be more receptive to their input; and to keep highly-skilled teachers in classrooms (personal communication with Cullison, 4/05).

Interestingly, teachers in the first two cohorts of CTs resisted the original requirement to return to the undifferentiated career of classroom teaching for two years. After considerable protest from these CTs, district officials amended this “two-year requirement” so that they could return to any “school-based position” including classroom teacher, department chair (called Resource Teacher in Montgomery County), or school-based coach. Figure 1 shows the role requirements of the program.

**Figure 1.** Role requirements of the Consulting Teacher program (shown as solid arrows) and possible job choices after completing the program (shown as dashed arrows).



Each year, members of the most senior cohort of CTs face a turning point: after completing three years as CTs and two subsequent years in school-based positions, they are no longer bound by the contract to remain in the school. Although some may continue as classroom teachers, others may assume different teacher leadership roles outside the school (including a new appointment as a CT), or enter administration. Some may leave public education altogether. Understanding how teacher leaders decide among these choices and how their experiences as teacher leaders influence those choices can inform policies and practices intended to increase teacher retention or develop a more differentiated teaching force. For this study, I investigated the career choices of second stage teachers in response to the two-year requirement to return to school-based positions. I also explored whether and how their experiences in the CT leadership role may or may not have influenced these choices.

## METHODS

This study consists of interviews with eight second-stage teachers who served as CTs in Montgomery County's Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) program. At the time of the interviews, each participant had either completed or was within months of completing the district's requirement to work for two years in school-based positions.<sup>2</sup> Participants are members of the first three cohorts of CTs hired by the district. Table 1 shows characteristics of the sample.

I constructed my sample with the help of the union president. She forwarded details of the study to all members of the first three cohorts, each of which included approximately twenty teachers. Those willing to participate in the study responded directly to me. Twenty four people said they would be willing to be interviewed; of those, ten had entered the CT

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<sup>2</sup> Since accepting the role of CT involved three years as CT and two years in a school-based position, in this paper, the full five years is referred to as the "program."

role in their second stage of teaching. The PAR panel president provided me with estimates of the characteristics of CTs as a group (personal communication with Doug Prouty, 9/06).<sup>3</sup> I then constructed a sample with a distribution of participants relatively similar to the characteristics of the general CT population by gender, school level, but not by years of experience. I interviewed eight teachers who entered the CT role with fewer than ten years of experience and eight who entered with more than twenty years of experience.

**Table 1. Distribution of participants by teaching experience and cohort .**

Name*	Years of teaching prior to becoming CT	Final year in the program (3 years as CT and 2 years in school-based position)	Cohort
Jill	8	2005	1
Sam	7	2005	1
Julie	6	2005**	2
Lisa	5	2006	2
Carol	5	2006	2
Chris	9	2007	3
Matt	6	2007	3
Colleen	6	2007	3

\*All names are pseudonyms.

\*\*Julie had a baby in her second year as a CT and left the program with the first cohort.

I purposefully constructed a sample where fifty percent of the participants had begun the CT role as second stage teachers because this was the target population for my study. As recent entrants to the profession, their perspectives and choices can shed light on the changing expectations of teachers, and I wanted to ensure a wider range of perspectives

<sup>3</sup> Precise statistics are not available.

from this group. Within the larger population, according to the PAR president's estimate, second stage teachers represented approximately one-third to one-half of all CTs. This paper analyzes the experiences of second stage teachers; future analysis will include the experiences of the veteran teachers.

Interviews were approximately 60 minutes (see interview protocol in Appendix A) and were transcribed verbatim. I analyzed the data through writing thematic summaries, analytic matrices, and memos, and checking my analysis with colleagues of the Project on the Next Generation of Teachers.

It is important to note the limitations of this study. The sample size is small, preventing findings from being generalizable. In addition, it is possible that people who served as CTs may have been predisposed to certain career choices regardless of their experiences in the CT role. In their interviews, respondents said that their job expectations had changed as a result of the role, although these recollections may not always be accurate. Sample bias may also be present if satisfied participants were more likely to respond to my email than people dissatisfied with the CT role. This latter limitation may not bias the sample, however, since a recent report documented general satisfaction with the CT role across multiple cohorts of CTs (Koppich, 2004).

## FINDINGS

As shown in Figure 2, after completing the full five-year commitment to the program, fewer than half of the participants in this sample chose to continue as classroom teachers.<sup>4</sup> Once they were no longer limited by contract restraints, one participant returned to a district-level coaching job and another became an Assistant Principal.

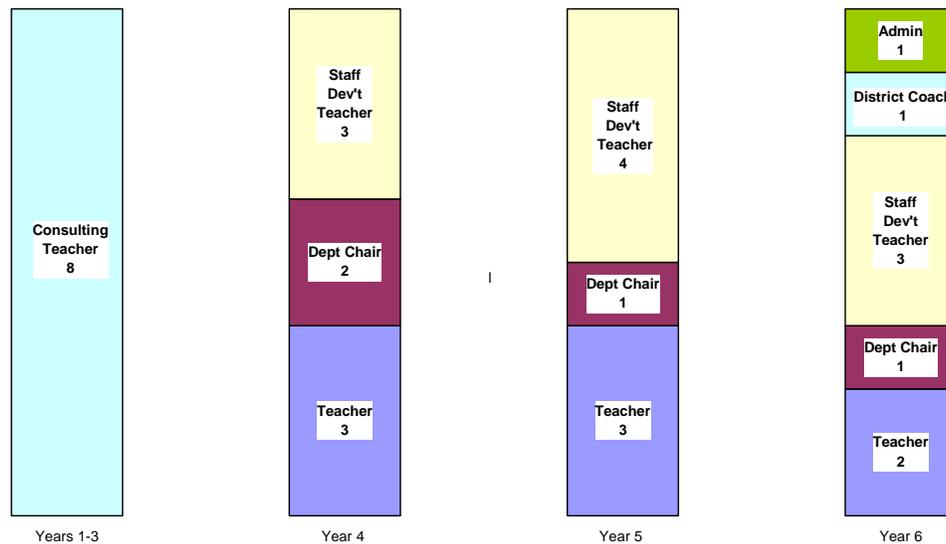
It is important to note that participants in this sample include members of different CT cohorts. At the time of their interviews, therefore, they were at different points in their

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<sup>4</sup> Data tracking job decisions for all program participants in the district is not available.

post-program career. Members of the third cohort were completing the final year of the program. These participants reported job decisions they'd made for the following year – “Year 6” in Figure 2. Even though interviews took place mid-way through the academic year, it is possible that participants may have changed their minds after the interviews and chosen different jobs than they reported they would take.

**Figure 2. Distribution of job choices after completing the three-year CT term.\***



*\*The district's role of Resource Teacher is labeled "Dept. Chair" since it is identical to the role of department chair in other districts.*

Interviews with these teacher leaders provided information not only about the jobs they chose but also the reasoning behind their decisions. The respondents' accounts of how they evaluated their various career options, came to their decisions, and ended up feeling about their job choices – these stories reveal important information about what these teacher leaders were looking for in future work. Overall, participants found the CT role to be rewarding. In assessing subsequent job prospects, they sought meaningful opportunities to work with colleagues, to use their newly acquired skills, and to influence instruction on a broad scale. Several of them also said that maintaining their current pay level was an

important factor in their job choices. From their perspective, classroom teaching could not meet these career expectations.

In the following discussion, I explore how these teachers' experiences in the CT role influenced their career trajectories. First I will describe their experiences in the role. Then, within the context of these experiences, I will report about what people in this sample were looking for in their immediate and future work, and discuss how participants assessed various options as they decided what to do.

### **Consulting Teachers' Experiences in the Role**

All of the participants said the role of Consulting Teacher was rewarding. Several said that they "loved" the job and hoped to return to serve in it again. Others said that, although they gained valuable skills and were glad to have had the experience, they didn't always enjoy the responsibilities of the role, especially when they were working with challenging underperforming veteran teachers who resisted or didn't respond to their help. Sam explained, "It was not a job that I loved, but it was the best learning experience that I've had as an educator." Participants found the CT role rewarding because it allowed them to deepen their understanding of good teaching, help other teachers improve instruction, engage in meaningful collaboration with CT colleagues, experience greater degrees of independence and flexibility in their work than they had as classroom teachers, see the "big picture" of the district, and learn new skills.

*Deepen their understanding of good teaching.* During the summer, CTs participated in twenty days of professional development, which included the same "Observing and Analyzing Teaching" class required for district administrators. More than half of these former CTs said that the training they received improved their understanding of good instruction. Colleen explained, "We're given so much training on what our county is looking at as a model of

what a good teacher is... we became really experts on that.” Instead of basing their assessments of teachers on instinct or their individual pedagogical style preferences, participants in the CT program were trained to share a common set of standards and expectations for quality instruction.

In addition, they said that the opportunity to observe in many classrooms – an opportunity that teachers rarely have – was an important source of learning. Two described carrying notebooks in which they noted particularly effective techniques or lesson ideas that they observed and later planned to incorporate into their own practice. Speaking of both the training and the opportunity to observe teaching across the district, one participant said, “I thought I was a pretty successful teacher.. but I think if I ever go back to the classroom full time, I think this is going to help me be even more successful as a teacher.” Colleen said that, as a result of the experience in the CT role, “You get a feel for good teaching and what it looks like.” For these two participants and their colleagues, working as a CT clarified the definition of good teaching and their ability to identify it.

*Help teachers improve instruction.* Collectively, CTs had a broad influence on teaching in the district, working with every new teacher and a significant number of veteran teachers each year. This was what ultimately convinced Chris, who was reluctant to leave the classroom, to take on the CT role in the first place. A member of the PAR panel had told him, “You’ll be working with a caseload of 20 teachers. Those 20 teachers will have 5 classes. You know, you’re going to be working with 100 different classes of kids times 30.” Knowing that he could influence more teachers made the job attractive to Chris.

Chris wasn’t alone. Jill summed up what she said were the benefits of the role, “I felt like I learned a lot and I felt like I was able to grow a lot. I also felt that I was able to really help a lot of beginning teachers.” Many remembered how hard their own first year had been and were glad to be able to help novices in a similar situation. Participants said

they felt good about helping all teachers improve their practice, both beginners and veterans.

Lisa said,

The real benefit of the job is... if you get a tenured teacher who has been teaching for 20 years or whatnot and you can guide them and support them to keep their job and be successful with kids – that’s the greatest benefit.

As Julie said, there was “a lot of gratification” in being able to provide this support to teachers so they could better serve their students.

Often, however, they cited frustration when caseloads increased, since they did not CTs didn’t have the time they thought they needed to adequately support teachers’ improvement. For example, Julie described having a caseload that was “huge.” She recalled how she described the situation to the union president,

I feel like I go in there, observe, give feedback, and then it’s on to the next second observation. There isn’t that time for the mentoring part of the job that I love -- modeling, support, planning -- that you want to give.

After this appeal for help, her caseload was reduced. Feeling effective at helping teachers make progress was an important source of satisfaction for these CTs.

*Engage in meaningful collaboration with colleagues.* In their work as CTs, these teachers grew accustomed to a high level of collaboration with their CT colleagues. CTs were each matched with a “PAR pair” consisting of an administrator and teacher from the PAR panel. In monthly meetings with these small groups, CTs shared ideas and checked in about the progress of the teachers in their caseload. In between meetings, most CTs informally and regularly consulted with one another to discuss challenges from their work and solicit coaching advice. One said she could “pick up the phone and call any one of my colleagues and the next day I [would] have three examples of growth plans sitting for me on my desk.” Others said that they sought out the advice of their colleagues and found it to be valuable. Lisa explained, “there’s just a level of thinking -- the reflectiveness is really strong amongst

[the CT] team.” For her, being a part of a “team” that collaboratively reflected on practice was a positive aspect of the role.

*Experience independence and flexibility.* Almost all of the participants said they enjoyed being able to decide what they would do each day and where they would work. They enjoyed the fact that, as Chris said, no one was “micromanaging you or looking over your shoulder.” CTs submitted their work schedules weekly to inform their supervisors about whom they intended to visit and what times they would work in the office. Julie summed up benefits that many mentioned, “I liked the flexibility. I liked the independence. I liked creating my own schedule.” This ability to create their own schedules contrasted sharply with teachers’ routine assignment where pre-set class schedules dictate most aspects of a teacher’s day. Matt only half-joked at one symbol of this new-found flexibility, “Whoa! We could go to the bathroom any time we wanted.” More than one participant appreciated a schedule that made it possible to attend to unexpected family needs such as a sick child. At another level, CTs appreciated the responsibility they were given to determine the frequency and nature of their interactions with the teachers they served. Chris said, “They trusted us to do our job.”

*See the “big picture.”* Consulting Teachers visited their clients in schools all over the county, often getting to know 10 to 20 schools over the course of a three-year term. They saw a significant benefit in observing in different classrooms and working with different administrators. Most referred to this as seeing the “big picture” of what was going on in the county. Chris explained, “When you are in one school, you really only get used to one thing. You don’t know what other people are doing. You don’t see what other people are doing.” As CTs, they had a broader view of the district. In the process, they became aware not only of a range of teaching styles but also a range of leadership styles. Carol said, “You get to travel around the county to different schools and you kind of get a sense of the culture at every school. It was a benefit because when you leave the CT position and apply... to get

back into a school-based position, you kind of knew what schools to stay away from.” Being in various schools and learning from their observations and professional development, enabled CTs to understand what combinations of characteristics produced both productive and unproductive work environments.

*A new challenge.* Several of the CTs said that a benefit of the role was the opportunity to do something new after being a classroom teacher for several years. Lisa said, “The greatest benefit was just the change, doing something different, and trying a new program.” Sam said that at the time he applied for the CT position, he’d been considering careers outside of education. He said, “I didn’t know what it would be. I knew I wanted a change.” For participants seeking different work, being a CT allowed them to stay in education. They enjoyed learning a new skills set. Colleen said that the role “required me to focus on a new set of skills. We did a lot of training on reflective conferences, how to deal with a difficult conference that you have to do. I felt like I had to hone my skills a lot more.” Gaining skills in a new type of work was appealing.

#### *Drawbacks of the role*

Most said that working with the underperforming veteran teachers was emotionally draining; and they frequently cited this as a drawback of the role. Julie described the challenge of realizing that she was collecting evidence that could lead to a teacher’s dismissal:

That part of the job was tough because you’re trying to support the person to meet standards, all the while you’re documenting their mistakes which was going to be used to possibly terminate them. You felt like you were wearing two different hats... there was some conflict there.

Although working with veterans who made progress was rewarding, almost everyone described working with veterans who struggled a great deal. Some cried during their meetings with the CT. Matt said, “the thing that really tore me up was that some of these people who were underperforming were really trying and they were really good people, they

just had been teaching so long they weren't meeting a lot of the needs of the kids in our district now." Others posed a challenge because, as one participant said, they were "really being harmful to kids and being real confrontational when you would meet with them." Sam said it was ultimately very lonely to be "meeting with people who don't want to meet with you." While participants found great satisfaction in working with the new teachers, working with the underperforming veteran teachers who resisted their help or didn't seem to improve proved to be a trying experience for everyone involved.

Participants also frequently mentioned isolation as a drawback of the role. As much as they valued the interactions they had with their fellow CTs, the majority of their time was still spent out of the office, traveling around the county observing individual teachers. "You're not really a part of a building..." Matt said. Colleen said that while visiting a school to meet with a client "sometimes you're in the staff lounge but you're not staff -- you don't feel comfortable in the staff lounge." Feeling no connection to a school community was said to be a negative aspect of the role. Besides these concerns, however, all but Matt were satisfied with the role and its responsibilities. Matt explained,

The negative things that I experienced were not because of any structural thing the county did as part of the position. It's just the nature of that job. It wasn't a personality match for me. But I think the position is necessary.

The drawbacks outweighed the benefits for Matt, but in this respect, he was the exception.

#### *Two-year requirement.*

There was no consensus among CTs about whether they supported the requirement to return to a school-based position for two years. Some believed that the requirement helped them be more effective in their work with teachers. They felt it gave credence to the "peer" label and that this was an important part of their relationships with teachers. Others claimed that the "peer" label was a misnomer at best and confusing at worst. For this reason, they saw no purpose in a requirement that would maintain their peer status. They

felt they should be allowed to apply for administrative or district-level jobs upon completion of their three-year CT term.

A majority of the group endorsed the requirement, although sometimes begrudgingly, because they felt it gave the role “legitimacy” in the eyes of teachers. Matt explained how this requirement reduced skepticism among teachers,

It’s so easy [for teachers] to say ‘Oh they don’t know what they’re talking about. When was the last time they were in front of 30 kids?’ But by being sort of fresh out of the classroom, it gives you a little more credibility.

The requirement also prevented those in the role from becoming “career CTs” who might lose touch with the realities of the classroom. Matt and others felt the requirement ensured that teachers would value their feedback because it was coming from a peer rather than a supervisor. Most participants said that when they met with their clients, they emphasized the “peer” nature of their relationship. Matt explained further,

I found that useful... the fact that I am going back... They’re being judged by one of their peers, not someone who’s going to be moving on to central office or something like that.

In addition to lending “credibility” to the work of the CT, the requirement also ensured that CTs would “take best practices back into schools.” This way individual schools could benefit from all the CTs had learned from their work across the district. Carol called this an effort to “recycle” the expertise of CTs, and participants said they could understand that rationale for the requirement.

Some participants said that another result of the two-year requirement was that it clarified for the CTs themselves that, as Chris said, “we weren’t administrators, we were colleagues, we were trained to come in and help them.” They felt this served as an ongoing reminder that their orientation towards clients was not as supervisors, but as providers of peer assistance. At the same time, participants agreed that the relationship was not simply

one of peer to peer for their job included “review” as well as “assistance” and at times their work looked much more like that of a supervisor than a peer. Chris observed,

The position they put us in is kind of a quasi-administrative position and they do give you a lot of training. When you are observing teachers, working with teachers, you are doing the same thing administrators do. So to kind of put all that training and money into teachers to then say, ‘Sorry, you are going to go back to the school for two years before you can move into administration.’ – I don’t know, I’m not quite sure how I feel about that.

At least half of the participants expressed this ambivalence, while others had strong reactions either in support of or opposed to the requirement. Carol said, “It really didn’t bother me, but I know it bothered a lot of people.” Most said they didn’t oppose the requirement personally, but they knew that other CTs had been concerned about it and so felt ambivalent. Overall, however, most CTs said that being able to identify themselves as peers tended to help both their own orientation towards the teachers with whom they worked and the way they were perceived by these same teachers.

### **Factors Influencing Career Decisions**

When CTs completed their terms and rotated back into schools to serve two years in school-based positions, they had to decide what kind of job to take. They could return to full-time classroom teaching, or they could pursue one of a few school-based leadership positions, such as Staff Development Teacher. If they taught at the middle or high school level, they could apply for a job as a Resource Teacher (department chair). At this juncture, five of the participants in this study chose leadership positions rather than full-time classroom teaching. After two years in school-based positions, participants had completed their obligation and could choose to apply for any job. Two moved out of “school-based positions” right away -- one to an administrative position and another to begin a new cycle as a CT. Of the three who did return to the classroom during the two-year requirement, only one remained after three years. (See Table 2) As noted earlier, because participants in this sample include members of different cohorts, at the time of the interviews, they were at

different points in their post-program career. Thus, information is available about “Year 7” and “Year 8” for some, but not all, participants.

**Table 2. Participants’ job choices after completing three years as Consulting Teachers.**

		Required to work in a school-based position		No restrictions on job choice		
Name	Cohort	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8
Jill	1	<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Teacher</b>	District Coach	District Coach
Sam	1	Staff Development Teacher	Staff Development Teacher	Staff Development Teacher	Assistant Principal	Assistant Principal
Julie	2	<b>Counselor (part-time)*</b>	<b>Counselor (part-time)*</b>	<b>Counselor (part-time)*</b>	<b>Counselor (part-time)*</b>	<b>Counselor*</b>
Lisa	2	<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Teacher</b>	District Coach <sup>+</sup>	District Coach <sup>+</sup>	
Carol	2	<b>Resource Teacher</b>	Staff Development Teacher	Staff Development Teacher	Staff Development Teacher	TBD**
Chris	3	Resource Teacher** + Staff Development Teacher	Resource Teacher** + Staff Development Teacher	Resource Teacher*** + Staff Development Teacher	TBD	TBD
Matt	3	<b>Resource Teacher</b>	<b>Resource Teacher</b>	<b>Resource Teacher</b>	TBD	TBD
Colleen	3	Staff Development Teacher	Staff Development Teacher	Assistant Principal	TBD	TBD

**Roles that include at least part-time teaching responsibilities are in bold; full-time classroom teaching roles are shaded.**

\*Julie served beginning and underperforming veteran counselors. She had a baby during her second year as a CT and left the program with the first cohort of CTs. She worked part-time in order to be home with her baby.  
 \*\*\*”TBD” indicates that at the time of the interview, this participant was not able to reliably report their choice of job for the year in question.

\*\*\*Resource Teachers usually carry a part-time teaching schedule. In Chris’ case, he performed SDT duties part-time in addition to being a Resource Teacher.

<sup>+</sup>MCPSD offered a variety of district-level coaching positions including Consulting Teachers, National Board certification coaches, mentor teachers, and specific curricular coaches.

Simply looking at the jobs people chose does not reveal what motivated and informed their career choices. In some cases participants chose jobs not because they preferred them but because they were not permitted to do what they really wanted to do. Thus, it is important to consider how the participants spoke about their options and their experiences in the jobs they took. These CTs sought jobs with many of the characteristics they had valued as CTs: increased level of compensation; opportunities for collaboration; and expanded professional authority, influence, and responsibilities. Thus, few felt they would find satisfaction in a full-time classroom teaching position. The following section addresses the factors that participants said influenced their career decisions and the reasons why they tended not to choose classroom teaching. Subsequent sections of this paper examine additional roles that participants considered.

#### *Equivalent Pay*

Pay was not a motivating factor for everyone, but for some, it was a high priority in their job search. Moving from the position of CT to being a full-time classroom teacher meant losing both the \$5,000 compensation for extra days worked in the summer and also the \$5,000 stipend granted to all CTs. School-based positions like Resource Teacher (the equivalent of department chair) and Staff Development Teacher came with the \$5,000 compensation for extra professional days, but not the additional stipend. One participant who became a Staff Development Teacher described the extra money on top of his teacher salary as a “bonus,” indicating that he appreciated it but did not see it as a priority in his job search. For others, however, the extra money was a priority as they considered their job options. Two participants said that they only considered positions where the pay was equivalent to what they had earned as Consulting Teachers. Matt, for example, said that after finishing his three years as CT, “I was really trying to get one of the [school-based]

leadership positions... mainly for financial reasons. I was a team leader before that so our family was used to that budget...losing a stipend would really have impacted us.” Matt only considered jobs that included extra summer days of work so that he could maintain an equivalent level of pay. Because team leader and Resource Teacher positions were often assigned to a member of the staff during the school year, Matt worried that he was less likely to get one of these positions than other school-based roles.

Even for Matt, however, more than money influenced his decisions. In describing his original decision to become a CT, he suggested it was one of two options he had considered at the time, and if he had not been appointed a CT, “the next move from just being a team leader would have been being a dept head or science resource teacher... which is a little more stimulating than just being a flat classroom teacher.” In seeking something “more stimulating,” Matt saw himself on a career trajectory that was not measured solely by increases in pay. He sought varied and new opportunities to combine with his otherwise undifferentiated classroom teaching role. Thus, even if there hadn’t been a pay cut, “flat” classroom teaching alone may not have been the desirable “next step” for Matt or others in the sample.

### *Meaningful Opportunities for Collaboration with Colleagues*

Several of those who returned to the classroom said they missed the opportunities for collaboration that they’d enjoyed as CTs. They found that expectations for collegial interaction in the school setting much different than what they’d experienced as CTs. Jill explained,

It was very frustrating for me. I mean people didn’t see the need for any professional growth and when I talked about teacher empowerment people were very sarcastic... The whole idea of – instead of sitting around complaining in the teacher’s lounge – doing something about it... they just didn’t see that as an option.

As a CT, Jill had felt empowered by the district to address problems she encountered; she had believed that as a teacher, she would be able to “do something about” school-based concerns, but she had little success. At one point, she convinced a disgruntled colleague to join her at a district meeting in order for her colleague to express her concerns to the district officials. She described it as a “lost cause” because after attending one meeting, the colleague didn’t want to go again and returned to complaining. Unable to engage her colleagues in what she thought would be meaningful efforts to address problems, Jill was left feeling frustrated and, at times, somewhat alienated from her peers.

Lisa described her experience of returning to the classroom similarly. She said, “There’s definitely more negativity and not this open thinking and collaboration that there is on a [CT] team.” She said that at team meetings, teachers seemed to feel so overwhelmed with the day-to-day demands of teaching that “their ability to take time to reflect on issues is limited.” Instead, she reported, precious meeting time was spent planning the holiday party, “collaboration” involved simply sending a copy of a lesson plan around the table, and overall, there was “not a lot of discussion on kids and learning.”

Even though both Jill and Lisa enjoyed many aspects of being in the classroom again, each ultimately ended up leaving classroom teaching. Jill said that despite her frustrations her colleagues were “fabulous teachers [but]they work in isolation more than not and I just think that they could be so much better.” She ended up leaving to design and lead a program supporting teachers’ applications for National Board Certification. Lisa returned to another district coaching role. She said she would consider rotating back to teaching at some point but she would be more cautious about where she taught – she and a friend joked that they would only go back if they could be each other’s team. Lisa wanted to ensure that she would have meaningful collegial interaction with someone whom she knew shared her focus on instruction.

### *Expanded Professional Authority, Influence, and Responsibilities*

In the role of Consulting Teacher, each of these participants exercised a level of authority and responsibility unprecedented for a classroom teacher. They spoke with pride about having been trained by many of the leading education consultants in the country. They were taught how to have “courageous conversations” with people who were not meeting standards, how to collect data about student learning and share it constructively with teachers, and how to identify, document, and model many instructional skills enumerated in the district’s “Bible” of instructional strategies. Equipped with this knowledge and skill, they were granted authority to make unannounced classroom visits, document the ways teachers were or were not meeting standards, work closely with principals to discuss teachers’ instructional improvement, and recommend renewal or non-renewal of teachers’ contracts. As they moved out of the program, CTs did not want to lose the professional authority and influence they exercised in the CT role.

Opportunities to put CT expertise into practice. One of the hopes that participants expressed was to find a job where their expertise would be recognized and used. One former CT said she would have considered part-time teaching but not full-time because “I have other things that I can offer and I wanted to be able to do that.” Others shared this desire and even used the same phrase – “put into practice” what they had learned – when discussing their career goals. Those who pursued teacher leadership roles spoke with satisfaction about being able to use the skills they’d gained. Matt said “there are a lot of people in my role [Resource Teacher] who I don’t think have as big a repertoire as I do in conferencing with those teachers [in my department] because they were not CTs.” He was glad to be able to capitalize on his knowledge and skills in working with adults.

Participants wanted to work for a supervisor who would recognize their expertise and allow them to exercise professional discretion. When Jill looked for her school-based

position, she wanted to work with a principal “who could respect me for my experience.” Chris, who became a Resource Teacher, said he appreciated that the principal trusted him to take on -- and learn from -- new challenges such as writing a proposal to design a new school for the county.

Some participants felt that even with a supportive principal, classroom teaching would, as one said, be a step “backwards” after having been CTs. One CT said, “I don’t think people believe that you’re moving up the ladder if you stay in the classroom.” These CTs were quick to explain that they didn’t mean that teaching was less important work or that it was too easy for them. In fact, they variously described teaching as “incredibly hard work,” the “most challenging job in the system,” and “deeply stimulating.” However, they objected to the loss of status associated with returning to the classroom. One vividly expressed the feeling that many voiced, “Teachers are the ones with hard hats doing the construction and everybody else are the ones with walkie-talkies telling them what to do.”

Flexibility and control. Those who did return to the classroom described the loss of control over their time and curriculum. One participant described losing the right to decide what to teach. When Jill returned to teaching, she continued to work with adults part-time in the evenings by teaching graduate-level classes meant to increase teachers’ professional expertise, skill, and judgment. This experience, she said, heightened the “dichotomy between what I was doing and what I wanted to do.” She said:

Here I am empowering teachers and helping them change their lives. And then I have to go grade stupid spelling tests because the district tells me I have to do them and I don’t see any value in them at all. Yeah, so I’m talking about teacher empowerment but then am not empowered to make teacher decisions in my classroom.

Jill felt her own professional expertise was compromised when she was required to follow district mandates rather than her own professional judgment.

These former CTs also missed having a schedule that accommodated their need to spend time with small children. At this point in their personal lives, many second-stage teachers were entering the parenting phase of their lives. During the course of their three-year terms as CTs, most in this sample went from having no children to having at least one child. With new concerns about dropping children off at day care and being available for unexpectedly ill children, several said they preferred jobs that provided flexible schedules.

Large scale influence on instruction. As CTs, participants were used to being able to influence instruction through their work with teachers, and, in considering their work options, they considered the extent to which they would be able to continue doing this. In discussing the factors she weighed in choosing her next position, Colleen said, “I look at how I want to spend my time during the day. In what way can I learn more, can I be in a position to do anything for kids and teachers in terms of the environment they work in?” Matt expressing a similar desire to work in a role that would allow him to influence teachers’ instruction, explained that he chose a Resource Teacher job rather than a position in the central office because in the other positions “I might not even be impacting as many teachers as I am now.” In judging the merit of his job, one of the features that mattered to Matt was the number of teachers he was able to influence.

After their experiences as CTs, program participants sought professional status and authority based on the extensive professional development they received in both recognizing and coaching for high-quality instruction. Having worked in a role which established their pedagogical expertise and granted them the ability to influence the professional practice of teaching on a large-scale, it was difficult to relinquish this aspect of the role. After completing the program, Jill said that at this point, it would be too hard to go back to the classroom teaching position she’d had before becoming a CT. She said, “The whole idea of

leaving the classroom and going back to the classroom is really a hard thing to do. To go out, do something where you grow... to leave and come back is really difficult... it's almost like getting knocked down a level.”

### **Alternatives to Classroom Teaching**

For these reasons, five participants in this sample did not choose to return to full-time teaching after serving as Consulting Teachers. In considering alternatives to classroom teaching such as Staff Development Teacher, administrator, and district-level coaching positions, they looked for positions that would make use of their specific skills and expertise in supporting the professional development of their peers. Finding a fit for these expectations proved difficult within the school-based jobs available to them. The following section addresses how participants weighed the pros and cons of alternatives to teaching.

#### *Staff Development Teacher*

At the same time that the Consulting Teacher role was introduced to the district, another significant leadership role, the Staff Development Teacher, was launched in a few schools. By the time the first three cohorts were ready to move into school-based positions, every school's faculty included the position of Staff Development Teacher. In many ways, the Staff Development Teacher (SDT) appeared to be a logical next step for someone who had been trained as a CT. Whereas a CT provided instructional support for individual teachers across the district, a SDT was intended to provide professional development for the entire staff of a single school. However, not a single one of the participants in this study actively sought out a Staff Development Teacher position. They had two main concerns: first, the Staff Development Teacher role depended heavily on the principal's interpretation and leadership; second, participants felt the role did not influence on instruction as much as they wanted.

Participants expressed concern that once they agreed to be a SDT, their work would be at the whim of their principal's wishes. Unlike the CT position, which was district-wide, often subject-specific, and focused exclusively on supporting teachers to meet performance standards, the SDT role description was less well-defined. One participant said, "I wasn't really sure what [SDTs] did." Exactly what they did and how they did it was largely up to the principal's discretion. More than one former CT worried that the principal would give them administrative duties (such as cafeteria duty) and that concerned them. Jill said, "one of my reservations was that the SDT at that school would then be acting as an assistant principal more so than working with the staff on their professional development."

Colleen reflected on why she originally chose to be a CT over a SDT: "When I saw SDTs, I saw them as the principal's right hand man – cheer leaders... the CT part seemed very clear in terms of what your job was and the fact that I was still a teacher..." This participant didn't want to look to the principal for direction in her coaching, nor did she necessarily want to be the mouthpiece of the administrator.

Participants were also reluctant to apply for the role of SDT because they weren't convinced that it was an effective strategy for improving instruction. Depending on the principal's vision for the role, teachers at a school might or might not be required to work with the SDT. Instead of being assigned a caseload of teachers as in their CT work, SDTs sometimes had to wait for people to come to them. Sam described the role as "more of a – 'I'll work with teachers if my principal wants me to or if teachers request it' " kind of role. This was different from the CT role in which he had been responsible for identifying teachers' strengths and weaknesses and guiding their progress towards meeting the standards. Since the SDT had to rely on others to identify both need and direction, Sam felt it would "inhibit" his ability to use the skills he learned as a CT. Colleen said she worked hard to build relationships "so that people can ask you to go into their classrooms."

Without the principal's support, participants felt they would be less able to help teachers improve their practice. Matt said, "'I couldn't see how [SDTs] really impacted the staff that much, so I didn't want to do that and be viewed... as a sort of not-needed role.'"

Despite their reluctance to apply for the role, several participants did ultimately choose to work as SDTs. In each case, they were personally recruited and won over by administrators. In their final year as CTs, two participants interviewed for positions as Resource Teachers, only to find that the principal really wanted them to be SDTs. Sam, who agreed to become an SDT, said he agreed to take the role because he anticipated learning a great deal from the principal, whom he admired. He said his decision to take the role "was more about the environment and the administrators at the school than about the role." Colleen, who was also recruited, said that the experience had been better than she'd thought it would be and that some of her initial fears were not realized. She discovered that her principal provided regular, scheduled release time when teachers were required to meet with Colleen. She said, "My principal has been good at not pulling me to do other things. She makes sure that my time is put where it should be. I've enjoyed the two years." Three of the four participants who accepted SDT roles gave credit to their principal for retaining as well as recruiting them in the role.

#### *Administrator*

Two of the eight people in this sample moved into administrative jobs within two years of leaving the PAR program. Two others pursued positions as Resource Teachers, the district equivalent of department chair, with evaluative responsibilities on par with an administrator. However, the rest of this sample said that, while they were interested in administration, they didn't want to do it right away. Their work as CTs had provided them with a close-up view of the role of principal which hadn't been as visible to them in their work as teachers. This experience had opened their eyes to two important features of the

principal's role: the unparalleled influence that the principal could have on instructional practice and the untenably long hours that principals work.

Every person in this sample said he or she learned through the CT role that the principal is the lynchpin of school improvement. For example, Sam said,

I realized the principal sets the tone for the whole building. If the principal is an intelligent, dynamic, knowledgeable principal, the building is going to reflect that and at the same time if the principal is unorganized, not dynamic, doesn't have the personal skills, by and large I found that the buildings were flat. People weren't motivated to come to work or it just wasn't the same level of instruction. So that really gave me a feel for where I wanted to go from there forward.

Sam saw that a skillful principal could make a difference in the quality of instruction implemented school-wide. He had not considered going into administration before becoming a CT, but he ended up choosing to be an assistant principal in his second year out of the program. Carol made a similar comment, "That was another benefit that I got from being a CT: basically the administrator in the building really makes the difference and creates the climate [for learning]." For this reason, most of those who had not considered being administrators before their CT experience, now considered it. Of the six who hadn't gone into administration by the end of this study, 5 had considered it and 4 of those said they hoped to be in an administrative job in 10-15 years when their children were older.

Interestingly, however, all of them -- even those who had originally planned on becoming administrators -- said that their experiences as CTs made them more cautious about pursuing the role. Carol said "after being a CT and seeing what goes on in a lot of schools I wasn't all that gung-ho about being an administrator." The day-to-day duties, as well as the long hours, were not appealing to Carol, who still thought she would pursue administration but not as early in her career as she had once planned. Others said they realized that, as a principal, they wouldn't be able to spend as much time with their young

children. Julie said “If you’re a principal of a school, you dedicate a lot of extra time above and beyond the required time to be there and I can’t do that with little ones.”

#### *Consulting Teacher/District-level Coach*

At the time of this study, two teachers in the district had applied and been hired to be CTs for a second time. Half of the participants in this study said they would be interested in returning to the CT position at some point in the future. Three of those who said they weren’t likely to reapply cited as reasons disliking difficult conversations with underperforming veterans and the isolation of the job. The fourth said that he would be interested if he could be guaranteed a leadership position upon his completion of the three years as CT. Without that guarantee, he said, “I don’t think I’d be tempted to roll the dice again.”

When talking about what they would do in the future, some participants anticipated moving to district-level jobs that focused on instruction. The CT role fit this description, and they guessed that the district would introduce other similarly focused roles in the future. In fact, two of them did take on such district coaching roles, and the comments of some of the participants indicated that these participants had come to expect such opportunities from this district. Matt, who was satisfied with his role as Resource Teacher, said, “The county’s always coming up with different positions that they think will help the kids learn and if they come up with something exciting I would entertain giving it a shot, too.” He felt the district was committed to providing meaningful ways to be involved in instructional improvement. In fact, one of the participants designed the role that she took on – district-level coach to teachers seeking National Board certification.

## DISCUSSION

This study is small and clearly not generalizable. However, keeping in mind the limitations, the patterns that emerged from these interviews provide a useful window into how teacher leaders in one district think about the job options available to them.

Specifically, this study sheds light on:

- participants' experiences in the CT role and how those influenced their career decisions
- participants' experiences upon their return to school-based positions and how those influenced their career decisions;
- participants' aspirations for future roles and the implications for Montgomery County's efforts to develop a career "lattice."

Findings from this study show that the CT role proved to be a challenging and rewarding experience for participants. It provided many benefits: a work culture oriented towards deepening their understanding of good teaching; colleagues whom they could count on to support and extend their learning; and opportunities to influence instruction on a broad scale. For three years, the program developed their skills in instructional leadership. After participating in this intensive program, many of these participants had experienced a shift in their priorities and focus. In contrast to most classroom teachers whose primary orientation is towards student learning in a single classroom, most of the CTs had turned their focus to whole-school or district-wide concerns. This shift in orientation made it difficult to return to the classroom-level roles from which they'd come.

After serving as instructional leaders for the district, participants sought roles that would allow them to retain the responsibilities and influence they had enjoyed in the CT role. Most did not want to return to teaching full-time. At the same time, they didn't want administrative roles right away. Rather, they wanted to focus collaboratively with their peers on instruction; they wanted to be instructional -- but generally not administrative -- leaders in

schools. These two objectives run counter to the prevailing teaching norms of egalitarianism and autonomy. Participants sought a school-based role that has typically not existed.

In the flat career of teaching, the most common avenue to leadership has been to become an administrator; other leadership positions either haven't existed or have faded quickly after being introduced (Hart, 1990; Little, 1988). In addition, a norm of autonomy has meant that teachers treat instructional practice as a private matter (Lortie, 1975). Efforts to make teaching practice more public and collaborative have typically met with resistance (Donaldson, Johnson, et al, forthcoming). After three years in positions that operated largely beyond these norms, participants seemed to experience something akin to culture shock upon reentering school sites where traditional norms dominated.

Former CTs found that it was not easy to delve deeply and collaboratively into instructional practice within the typical school structure. Teachers were harried by heavy workloads, rigid schedules, and limited time. Without formal structures for meaningful collaboration, what time there was for sharing was used for brief, superficial matters rather than meaningful reflection on instruction. Participants perceived the SDT role to be a risky endeavor. Without consistency about role responsibilities and the certainty of administrative support, it was unclear whether they would be able to meet their goals of improving instruction. Under pressure to make the SDT role seem less threatening and thus drum up more business, they might feel compelled to dilute their message and potentially lessen the influence of their role (Donaldson, Johnson, et al, forthcoming). For educators interested in influencing instruction, this was an unappealing prospect.

So what job decisions did they make? Perhaps most notably, these former CTs chose to stay in education. At the time they applied to be CTs, some had questioned whether they would stay in the career. However, *after* their leadership experience as CTs, none of them considered leaving education. In some ways, the CT role may have gotten

them through what Huberman calls the “danger zone” years in which restlessness and curiosity about roles outside of education can lead people to abandon the career (1993).

These participants’ commitment to stay in meant that the district retained their expertise and experience. The challenge facing the district was how best to tap this resource.

Some of the participants entered administrative positions. As Resource Teacher (department chair), Matt was thrilled to combine his skills in observing and coaching adults with working with children each day. After completing their school-based requirement, two others put their skills into practice in supervisory roles by becoming Assistant Principals. Still others planned to pursue administrative positions in the future when family demands allowed. No doubt, the skills these participants learned as CTs will benefit students and teachers. For years to come, the district will be reaping rewards from their investment in these participants’ leadership development.

Others moved out of schools and back into district-level coaching positions focused exclusively on improving instruction. The fact that the CT job still remained appealing to participants points to successful design and implementation of the new role. In these cases, the role may fulfill one goal of the program – to provide opportunities for people to rotate back and forth between classroom and leadership roles. One participant who returned to the classroom said, “[the CT role] made me want to go back to the classroom. We were learning all these techniques, you see all these amazing things [while observing], and that definitely encouraged me to go back to the classroom.” By teaching a new grade level, she said she learned from her experience in the classroom, but she also said it lacked the collaboration and reflective community to which she had grown accustomed. She was eager to rejoin that community and did so after completing two years in a school-based position.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Despite missing the benefits of the CT community, she said that she had planned to stay in the classroom at least one year longer. However, a school merger prompted her to lose her job

Remaining participants were content but not entirely satisfied with the jobs they held after finishing the program. They remained in a form of occupational limbo – wanting a job that was not quite teacher and not quite administrator and not yet in existence in most schools. Most settled for the role of SDT and considered themselves fortunate when their principals provided necessary structure and accountability to make the job feel more effective. Within the norms of egalitarianism and autonomy, the expertise of these teachers remains largely an untapped resource. Under these conditions, the likelihood that future teacher leaders will *want* to return to classrooms, or even leadership positions like Staff Development Teacher, will remain small.

Montgomery County’s reform-minded lattice of differentiated roles is still in the beginning years of implementation, so it remains to be seen whether new roles ultimately will transform or conform to the prevailing culture. With the CT role, the district has succeeded at designing a differentiated role that fosters increased collaboration, focuses clearly on instructional improvement, and which proves to be satisfying and meaningful to CTs. However, the role conforms to the norm of egalitarianism by stripping a teacher of her stipend and recognition of her expertise when she returns to the classroom. As long as classroom teachers’ compensation and decision-making authority parallels that of the lowest rung of an organization chart, it is likely the job will continue to feel like the bottom of the career ladder. In order for classroom teaching to compete with teacher leadership positions, the district could consider basing compensation and responsibilities on “knowledge and skills” rather than years of experience (Odden and Kelley, 2002).

In addition to reinforcing the importance of the role of classroom teacher, the district would do well to protect the tenuous role of school-based teacher leader. As

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because she lacked seniority. Thus another norm of teaching -- that of seniority -- contributed to this teacher leader’s departure from the classroom.

evidence from this study suggests, the SDT position is at risk of losing some of its most capable applicants because of inconsistencies in its implementation which prevent the role from having the influence on instructional improvement which teacher leaders desire. Principals need specific guidance to structure the role for maximum benefit and build the role into informal accountability measures already in place in their schools. Without this institutional support, research has shown that teacher leadership roles become less appealing to those most eager to lead reform (Donaldson, Johnson, et al, forthcoming). Those who do stay in the role are likely to engage in strategies that lessen the resistance of their peers but simultaneously “limit the extent of influence they might have on colleagues’ practice” (Donaldson, Johnson, et al, forthcoming, p. 34). Increasing the number of leadership positions is not sufficient to sustain and satisfy the needs of this new generation of teacher leaders. Ensuring their success is equally important. Montgomery County has put in place an impressive system of leadership roles. Supporting and supervising these roles, while taking account of the norms that inhibit their success, is the challenge for Montgomery County and other districts around the country.

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## Appendix A – Interview Protocol

### **Background questions**

- What grade/subject do you teach?
- For how many years were you out of college when you began teaching?
  - If more than three, what did you do?
- For how many years had you worked as a classroom teacher before becoming a CT? (were all those years in Montgomery County?)
- What were your expectations of the teaching career when you entered? Did you have a feeling one way or another about how long you wanted to work as a classroom teacher?
- What is the name of the school where you taught before becoming a CT?

### **Career plans at time of applying for CT role**

“I’m interested to know about your decision-making process as you were first thinking about applying to be a CT.”

1. What other job opportunities were available to you at that time? Did any appeal to you?
2. How did you decide to become a Consulting Teacher (CT)? What appealed to you about the position?

### **Experience of the role**

3. How do you feel about the CT role? Why do you feel this way?
4. What are the greatest benefits of the CT role?
5. What are the greatest drawbacks of the role?
6. Should any changes be made to the role?

### **Career plans at time of applying for required school-based position**

“I’m interested to know about your decision-making process after you finished your CT role and entered the two-year requirement to be in a school-based role.”

7. What factors did you weigh as you made this job decision?
8. What position did you take on after you finished your 3 years as CT and began your school-based role?
  - Tell me about how you came to be in that position.

- Was that your first choice of a job at that time?
9. If the school-based requirement hadn't been in place, do you think your job decision would have been different?
  10. *For participants who took staff development roles:* What would you have done if this position hadn't existed in the district?
  11. *Probes if participants don't mention classroom teaching:* Did you consider classroom teaching? What would have made teaching more attractive? If there were no paycut involved in returning to classroom teaching, would you have returned to that work?
  12. *Probes if participants don't mention administrative roles:* Did you consider any administrative roles? Explain.
  13. District officials have said that the requirement to return to school-based positions is part of a strategy to keep master teachers in the classroom rather than lead people out of teaching and into administration. What are your thoughts about this strategy?
    - Do you consider a staff development role to be a teaching or administrative role? Have you always viewed it in this way?

#### **Career plans after finishing entire CT commitment (3 + 2 years)**

14. What position will/did you take at the end of your two years in a school-based role?
15. What positions have you applied for/did you apply for?
16. What factors did you weigh as you made this decision?

#### **Thoughts about the future**

17. Has teaching been what you expected it to be? Why or why not?
18. Where do you see yourself in three years? In ten years?
19. As you think about the future, what kinds of work appeals to you? Has this changed over time?
  - Has your role as CT influenced these plans?
  - Has your role as CT influenced your view of classroom teaching? administration? If so, in what ways?
  - How long do you plan to stay in teaching? Explain. OR Do you think you will be a classroom teacher sometime in the future? Explain.
  - What would keep you in the classroom longer?
  - Do you think you will work as an administrator sometime in the future? Explain.

- Do you plan to apply for the role of CT again? Explain.