Chapter 9
Regenerating Teachers

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Julie is in her eighth year of teaching at one of the top suburban high schools in the state of Massachusetts in the United States. She teaches history and psychology at both the general and Advanced Placement levels and has been at this same school since she began her career in teaching. Since the birth of her son more than 2 years ago she has been working a reduced schedule, which she hopes to continue into next year as well. Julie is in her mid-30s and teaching is her second career; prior to teaching she worked in political organizing.

Like many other teachers of her generation, Julie struggles with the balance between home and work life; with the types of changes she is being asked to make to her curriculum as a result of standardized testing regimes; and with her role as a teacher as she moves from being the new kid on the block to one of the more veteran teachers on her staff. She loves teaching but is considering a move into counseling, which would allow her to continue to work with students but perhaps offer something exciting and new in terms of her personal career development. She expresses little to no interest in being in administration, although she has held multiple leadership positions in her school over the course of her 8 years there.

Harrison is also a teacher in mid-career at a public school in the same state. In his late-30s, he works in an urban, underperforming school district. He has taught for 15 years and has changed schools multiple times. He currently teaches pre-algebra to students in the eighth grade. At his school, math is one of the most scrutinized subjects, as the school has not made Adequate Yearly Progress as required by No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Harrison's teaching is monitored tightly and he feels very little pedagogical freedom at present, a change that he feels undervalues him as a professional.

Harrison enjoys teaching but always keeps his eye on job listings for placements outside of his school. He would like to be an administrator but feels that his status as an African-American male works against him. He has applied for multiple administrative positions only to be turned away time and again. He feels he is well-compensated for his work and takes on extra opportunities to make more money, so he is not eager to leave the field entirely, especially within his district which, while challenging, pays well. He has a wife and small child at home, and until his wife goes back to work he feels obligated to stick it out.

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These two teachers, on the surface, have a number of things in common: both are in mid-career, both are in their mid- to late-30s, both teach in secondary public schools in a state that has had high-stakes testing in place for several years. Both enjoy teaching and feel successful in their roles, both have young children, and both are slightly uncertain as to what the future holds in terms of their career growth and development. Both are part of Generation X, the generation known for supposedly trying to have it all and on their own terms. How will their careers unfold or progress? For the leaders who work with these teachers, what knowledge is necessary to keep them satisfied and effective in their work?

Generations are very much in the news. The *Boston Globe Magazine* (2008) dedicated an entire issue to the Baby Boomer Generation in July 2008, and William Safire (2008) devoted his "On Language" column in *The New York Times* to defining generations in November of the same year. Even as I began to organize my thoughts for this chapter, I could not help but think how much my generation defines me. I barely set foot in the library to retrieve books and articles to support my data; instead, I Googled the term "description of Generation X" to find out key sources, spent a fair amount of time on Wikipedia reading relevant articles, and searched my university's electronic journal archive for sources. I do not write by hand or even use a typewriter. Rather, I exclusively use a computer – a Macbook, of course. While I type, I keep several windows on my desktop open: Gmail, Facebook, and the *New York Times*. I cannot multitask as well as my younger peers, but I am wired in at all times. Like most of my peers, I am half of a household (one fourth, I suppose) with two working parents. I have the luxury of writing today because my husband has arranged his work schedule such that he stays home on Mondays so I can work. While I type away, he watches our infant son upstairs. Our toddler daughter is enrolled in a local Montessori school. When we made our childcare plans, we just worked under the assumption that each of our employers would accept this more flexible schedule. While one of Generation X's defining characteristics is its unwillingness to actually identify as part of a generation, I cannot help but see myself reflected in the literature I have read and stories I have heard about my generation.

This anecdote might seem unimportant, but I believe it is actually quite telling. I am a bona fide member of Generation X. I was born in 1973, which pretty much puts me right in the middle of my generation. We are a unique generation, sandwiched between the Boomer generation, known for its idealism, and Generation Y (also called Millennial), still working out its adult identity but currently seen as more engaged and defined as more productive than my generation, its predecessor. Even demographically speaking we are smaller: 46 million compared to 80 million (Boomer) and 78 million (Millennial) (Stephey, 2008). Nobody really has anything good to say about my generation. We are seen as cynical as slackers (Zemke et al., 2000) and as unable to commit to careers, marriage, or family life (Watters, 2004). In fact, we have married much later than our parents did and are having children later too. Our inability to commit is seen as a by-product, in some ways, of being latchkey children of the 1980s, left to fend for ourselves while our mothers entered the workforce unlike generations of women before them (Zemke et al., 2000; Lovely & Buffum, 2007). Our prospects are bleak – we may even be the first generation to not be as financially successful as the previous generation (Ellis, 2007).

And yet, in speaking to Generation Xers, specifically Generation X teachers, I have found something quite different from these standard stereotypes, something more promising and optimistic. What others see as slack, we see as flexible. What others see as entitled, we see as balanced. We want to work on our own terms, and we are willing to walk away from jobs that do not meet our needs (Zemke et al., 2000; Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). These differences play out not only in terms of family and work life generally, but specifically in terms of the careers of many of today's teachers. No matter how one looks at it, this is not our parents' teaching career, nor is it the career described by the Boomer generation writers who still dominate this literature and the portraits of that generation largely centered within it.

Through an analysis of the literature on generations, as well as interviews with 12 Generation X teachers, this chapter explores the generational differences of teachers and how understanding these differences is critical to understanding trends regarding the teaching career. The title "Regenerating Teachers" suggests two notions to keep in mind: First, that the way in which educational scholars understand teachers and their career trajectories may need to be reconsidered in light of generational differences among teachers and the academics who interpret their lives, and second, that this revised generational understanding may in fact help regenerate teachers' satisfaction and efficacy in their work and workplace.

This chapter is timely for several reasons. First, earlier work by such researchers as Huberman (1989) and Sikes et al. (1985) was conducted within systems and times with traditional career structures, where a new teacher might expect to enter teaching and remain for the duration of the career, or move after a period of time into leadership positions. In this structure, leadership meant leaving the classroom, and moving away from learning and instruction as a teacher. Teachers who did not progress to leadership but stayed in the classroom were most likely people who deliberately chose not to move up, or people who, by their own judgment or others', simply lacked the capacity to lead. Now, teachers have different leadership opportunities that do not necessarily take them away from the classroom. Leadership, and its relationship to teaching and learning, is positioned differently. Teachers are encouraged to take on more roles, and to take them earlier, than their predecessors (Bartlett, 2004). However, administrative roles are often shunned by people in this particular age group as they are viewed as taking teachers away from the very students whom they desire to serve (Donaldson, 2007). This study incorporates the changed understanding of teachers' roles regarding practice and leadership in a way that earlier studies, situated in a more traditional, linear career model, could not.

Second, this study fills several gaps in the literature on teachers' careers. Much of the literature in the field is primarily from the 1980s and early 1990s. Work in the current context of No Child Left Behind may provide different understandings of the career cycle. Additionally, the best-known work in the field, namely Huberman (1989) and Sikes et al. (1985), takes place outside of the American context. While these studies undoubtedly provide insight into the paths of teachers' careers, they do not address the unique American context, post-A Nation at Risk and up to and including No Child Left Behind. And last, the issues that face teachers in the other work on teachers' careers, such as generational mission (Goodson et al., 2006; Riseborough, 1981) and gendered patterns of mid-career choice, such as

homemaking (Sikes et al., 1985) may no longer apply. This study will shed new light on the issues facing teachers in the present, post-millennium, American context.

Finally, this study will explore an area that has yet to be examined by researchers, that of generational identity of teachers, particularly those considered Generation X. Most teachers in mid-career now fall into this generational category, and the issues that face them as they progress through their careers differ to a great extent from those of the generations both before and after them. These differences warrant a new field of study, one that intersects both the study of teachers' careers and lives and the leadership issues that affect this new crop of mid-career teachers, both in terms of what type of leadership is needed to keep them engaged and involved in the classroom but also one that understands how they progress into newly defined leadership roles of their own.

Research Design

The empirical data that inform this study are part of a larger, mixed-methods study that is the basis for my dissertation. This particular chapter uses the qualitative data collected from semi-structured interviews (Merriam, 1998) of 12 participants with 7 to 20 years of teaching experience in secondary schools. These teachers are considered established and in the mature phase of their teaching (Burden, 1982, in Fessler, 1995; Sikes, 1992). For the purposes of the original study, which focuses on the impact of mandated change on teachers in mid-career, the sample was limited to secondary teachers primarily because change is notoriously difficult in secondary schools due to their size, bureaucratic complexity, subject traditions and identifications, and closeness to university selection (Goodson, 1983; Hargreaves, 2003; Louis & Miles, 1990; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001). The limit regarding teaching experience is based on my understanding that a teacher who remains in the class after 7 years has committed significant emotional, physical, and financial resources to her career as a teacher and thus has a certain level of investment in – and identity with – her role as teacher (Sikes et al., 1985). The data are also limited to public school teachers, because I was interested in speaking with teachers regarding mandated change and in particular the state of Massachusetts' high-stakes test, MCAS. I did not limit the study to urban or suburban areas but instead allowed sampling to encompass either type of school.

Sampling for this study was purposive and relied on a snowball design to get participants (Merriam, 1998). I began by posting a message to a listserv for parents to which I belong, asking for teachers in a public school in a major subject area with 7 to 20 years of teaching experience. From this post, I found four participants. These teachers referred me to other teachers they know, thus expanding my sample. I also found participants through personal contacts in local schools.

With a snowball design, the sample is not randomized and this one may appear to be fairly homogeneous. However, demographic trends note that at this moment, the teaching force itself is fairly homogeneous; that is to say, female, White, and

middle-class (Cochran-Smith et al., 2002; Goodwin, 2002). As it turned out, my sample included more men than women – atypical of the current teaching force that is predominantly female.

Participants

Twelve teachers from multiple school districts in the state of Massachusetts participated in the qualitative component of this study. The participants were from major subject areas in secondary public schools: English Language Arts, Science, Mathematics, and History/Social Studies. Special Education was also included, although teachers with this classification typically worked within the major subject areas. As the study design to gather participants was snowball, there was little consideration for factoring in how many teachers of a particular subject area participated. Also not factored in were gender and race, although members from minority groups in teaching – people of color and men – were randomly included in the sample.

Table 9.1 details the participants in the study:

Data Analysis

The interviews lasted between 45 min and 1 h. Each interview was digitally recorded and then fully transcribed. As each transcription was completed, I used line-by-line coding to ensure the most thorough reading of each interview (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Constant memoing (Charmaz, 2006) was used to record themes and keep track of noticeable patterns and trends as well as thoughts for further study. I used the qualitative software package HyperResearch to keep track of my coding.

Generations

The use of the term "generation" in human population terms is thought to have originated with Karl Mannheim's publication of the essay "The Problem of Generations" in 1952 (Edmunds & Turner, 2002). According to Mannheim, a generation is shaped, held together by, and ultimately determined by common events that form its worldview. People within generations experience these events at the same time. Furthermore, generations follow observable historical patterns (Strauss & Howe, 1991). As generational theorist Jean Twenge observes, "The society that molds you when you are young stays with you the rest of your life" (Twenge, 2006, p. 2). Generational conflict arises because members of different generations experience these same events in different ways (Edmunds & Turner, 2002).

Table 9.1 Study participants

ID[a]	Subject	Year born	Years teaching	Gender	Race	Type of school
Harrison	Math	1968	15	Male	African-American	Urban middle, low performing
Alice	English Language Arts	1973	10	Female	White	Suburban high, high performing
Andrew	Physics	1973	9	Male	White	Urban high, high performing
Julie	History	1973	8	Female	White	Suburban high, high performing
Samantha	Special Education/ English Language Arts	1973	8	Female	White	Urban middle, low performing
Doug	History	1973	13	Male	White	Suburban high, high performing
Michelle	Special Education	1977	8	Female	White	Suburban middle, high performing
Jim	English Language Arts	1969	15	Male	White	Suburban high, high performing
Sarah	English Language Arts	1979	7	Female	White	Urban high, low performing
Bill	History	1974	8	Male	White	Suburban high, high performing
Mike	Math	1973	11	Male	White	Urban high, high performing
Max	Math and Science	1973	9	Male	White	Urban high, high performing

[a]All the names have been changed to protect the identities of the participants.

At present, there are five living generations (Strauss & Howe, 1991), four of which are in the workplace (The G.I. generation being the exception): G.I., Veterans/ Traditionalists, Boomers, Generation Xers, and Millennials. Table 9.2 describes the boundaries for each of these. Different scholars use different age boundaries to define each generation but the bulk of the age group is roughly the same (Zemke et al., 2000; Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Lovely & Buffum, 2007). There are roughly 22 years between generations, shown below in Table 9.2 (Strauss & Howe, 1991).

Each of these generations has its own unique "peer personality" (Strauss & Howe, 1991) defined by a common age location, common beliefs and behavior, and perceived membership in a common generation (p. 64). Table 9.3 charts some of these personality characteristics.

While it is helpful to see the peer personalities of each of these generations, this chapter focuses largely on only the Boomer and Generation X generations.

Table 9.2 Living generations (Adapted from Strauss & Howe, 1991)

Generation	Born	Age in 2008
G.I.	1901–1924	84 to 107
Silent/Veteran	1925–1942	66 to 83
Boomer	1943–1960	48 to 65
13er/Generation X	1961–1981	27 to 47
Millennial	1982–present	0 to 26

Table 9.3 Unique characteristics of each generation (Adapted from Zemke et al., 2000)

Veterans	**Baby boomers**
Dedication/sacrifice	Optimism
Hard work	Team orientation
Conformity	Personal gratification
Law and order	Health and wellness
Respect for authority	Personal growth
Patience	Youth
Delayed reward	Work
Duty before pleasure	Involvement
Adherence to rules	
Honor	
Generation X	**Millennials**
Diversity	Optimism
Thinking globally	Civic duty
Balance	Confidence
Technoliteracy	Achievement
Fun	Sociability
Informality	Morality
Self-reliance	Street smarts
Pragmatism	Diversity

The forces that shaped the Boomers and Generation X respectively clearly influenced the worldviews of each group (Strauss & Howe, 1991). The Boomers' parents raised them with the wisdom of child expert Dr. Benjamin Spock, who advocated affection and permissiveness with children (Wikipedia, 2008a). The launch of Sputnik revolutionized their education, moving a more traditional curriculum to focus on science and math to ensure American students could keep up with their global peers. As teenagers and young adults, Boomers participated in the Summer of Love, in peace rallies around the country, in Woodstock, and in protests at Kent State. They were feminists and civil rights pioneers who advocated equal rights for all. As young adults they were hippies who believed in peace and love; as they aged they became yuppies who espoused more materialistic goals. Boomers were the first generation to have access to legal abortions through *Roe v. Wade* and were the first to be able to prevent pregnancy with the use of birth control pills.

The children of the Boomers became Generation X, and the legacy of the Boom generation is clear (Wikipedia, 2008b). Literally and metaphorically speaking, this was the first generation whose parents chose to have them – or not to have them – because of their abortion and birth-control freedoms. They were latchkey

children left at home while both parents worked. Generation X views themselves as “survivors”: They survived skyrocketing divorce rates, stock market crashes, and outsourcing. Lovely and Buffum (2007) suggest that this survivor mentality is what shapes their view of work: They have lower expectations of what jobs can offer and lower trust in authority figures as a result of their difficult upbringing.

Generations in the Workplace

The peer personalities of each generation affect many aspects of their lives, including attitudes toward family and community (Strauss & Howe, 1991; Watters, 2004). Similarly affected are a generation’s attitudes toward work and behavior in the workplace. Table 9.4 describes the “generational footprint” of each group in the workplace.

Not only are each group’s beliefs about work and the workplace different; in fact, their very understandings of career differ sharply, and this too affects their work lives in terms of dedication to their job and to their career. Lancaster and Stillman (2002) argue that the two older generations in the workplace, Traditionalists/Veterans and Boomers, who came of age in an era of American productivity, are motivated by “job security” (p. 53). Job security is staying with one company, working one’s way up, and protecting oneself on a track record of high performance and stability. Younger generations, however, operate under a “career security” model (p. 54). Career security is premised on creating a varied set of skills and experiences that will make a person marketable in a variety of circumstances. To obtain these skills and experiences, those seeking career security may change jobs several times. Generation Xers, who came of age as American job stability waned, are more likely to seek career instead of job security. Table 9.5 describes generational differences around career goals.

Generations and the Teaching Career

Each of the generations views just about everything differently, including careers in general and also teaching in particular. Generational research suggests that a new teacher entering the field today need not have the same career path and patterns as a teacher 30 years her senior (Strauss & Howe, 1991; Johnson, 2004). Johnson and her colleagues’ work in Massachusetts demonstrates how today’s new teachers are very different from their predecessors. They may not have entered teaching through traditional routes such as education schools or education majors in undergraduate institutions; they may be more likely to be men, to be different races, to speak different languages. These insights into how new teachers differ from veteran teachers as they begin their careers touches on the different types of knowledge we will need to have to understand the concerns of “new” teachers as they move up through the ranks.

Table 9.4 The generational footprint of a workplace (From Lovely & Buffum, 2007, and adapted from Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Raines, 2003; Zemke et al., 2000)

Generation	How they perform on the job	How they integrate on teams	How they lead others
Veterans	Driven by rules and order Strive to uphold culture and traditions Able to leave work at work Need more time for orientation Find technology intimidating	Are okay with the power of collective action, as long as a central leader is in charge Respect experience Want to know where they stand and what's expected of them Eager to conform to group roles	Value dedication and loyalty Equate age with status/power Impose top-down structures Make most decisions themselves Keep work and personal life separate View change as disruptive and undesirable
Baby boomers	Have a strong need to prove themselves to others May manipulate rules to meet own needs Deferential to authority Focus on product outcomes Can become political animals if turf is threatened Work long hours	Enjoy and value teamwork Expect group to stick to the schedule and agenda Willing to go the extra mile Good at building rapport and solving problems Embrace equity and equality Want credit and respect for accomplishments	Shy away from conflict Tend to lead through consensus Generally apply a participatory approach, but may struggle with delegation and empathy Embrace leadership trends and personal development Expect people to put in their time Less flexible with change
Generation X	Strive for balance, freedom and flexibility Strong dislike for corporate politics, fancy titles or rigid structures Expect to have fun at work Prefer independence and minimal supervision Good at multitasking Value process over product	Like to work on teams with informal roles and freedom to complete tasks their own way Do well on projects calling for technical competence and creativity Work best with teammates of their own choosing Detest being taken advantage of Struggle to build rapport with other group members	Drawn to leadership for altruistic reasons – not power or prestige Casual and laid-back Try to create an environment that is functional and efficient May lack tact and diplomacy Able to create and support alternative workplace structures Willing to challenge higher-ups Adapt easily to change

(continued)

Table 9.4 (continued)

Generation	How they perform on the job	How they integrate on teams	How they lead others
Millennials	Anxious to fit in Respectful of authority, but unafraid to approach their boss with concerns Value continuing education Exceptional at multitasking Drawn to organizations with career ladders and standardized pay/ benefits	Accepting of group diversity Determined to achieve team goals Respond well to mentoring Enjoy working with idealistic people Expect to be included in decisions Need a bit more supervision and structure than other groups	Open to new ideas Able to work with varying employee styles and needs Prefer flattened hierarchy Hopeful and resilient Display more decorum and professionalism than Xers Lack experience handling conflict and difficult people

Table 9.5 Clashpoint around career goals (From Lancaster & Stillman, 2002, p. 55)

Traditionalists	"Build a legacy"
Baby Boomers	"Build a stellar career"
Generation Xers	"Build a portable career"
Millennials	"Build parallel careers"

Strauss and Howe (1991) have written extensively on the topic of generations and argue that generations occur in cycles. Specifically, they argue that there are four generational types that recur in cyclical patterns over time. Each generation has a personality type and reacts to social changes in predictable ways – although different from each generation to the next. They urge researchers to think of aging using train and station metaphors. As they describe it, most people, when studying aging, focus on "stations." Every train goes through the same stations; every generation in this metaphor represents a different train. So, if stations are childhood, youth, midlife, old age, etc., each generational train passes through each station. The trains are fairly identical using this metaphor. What Howe and Strauss argue, in contrast, is that generations need to be framed as trains and that each train should be viewed differently although they pass through the same stations.

Stretching this metaphor, we can view teacher generations as "trains" as well. The current generation of teachers in mid-career is what Howe and Strauss call "thirteeners" and what others commonly understand as Generation X (Twenge, 2006). These teachers were born between the years 1961 and 1981 and are now in their late 20s to late 40s. Most of the research on aging teachers, however, has focused on teachers of the previous generation, what Howe and Strauss call the "boom" generation, born between 1943 and 1960, and an emerging body on the new "boom" of Millennials.

The current generation of new teachers, called "Millennials," have yet another set of concerns that differ from their predecessors and that will indeed differ from future generations, but the work of Johnson and her colleagues (2004) in relation to this new generation that is now entering the workforce in large numbers to replace their retiring Boomer colleagues focuses largely on how this "next generation" of teachers will fare in today's classrooms, not on the issues facing teachers presently in mid-career. This chapter focuses on the middle generation of Generation X teachers currently in classrooms, not just as a "generation" of teachers but as a "generation" of adults different from those both before and after them.

Findings

When I began my research, I started with the idea that perhaps a teacher's generation, more than the conditions in which she works, might speak volumes about her desire to remain in teaching as a career. I based this hypothesis on my own abbreviated experience as a classroom teacher in a struggling urban school and on my friends' and colleagues' similar experiences. All of us felt that teaching was something we wanted to try, but when we felt either not good enough at it, or too overwhelmed by the micropolitics (Schempp et al., 1993; Blase & Anderson, 1995) of the school in which we worked, or we wanted to stay home with our children and find a way to still keep one foot in the world of education, we reshaped our careers to fit our desires. How very Generation X of us! We wanted to have our cake and eat it, too. While others (older generations) looked at our choices and felt we gave up or gave in too early, or that we were slackers who could not handle being adults with professional responsibilities, we saw it as within our right to make the choices that best suited ourselves and our families. If this was true of my peers, could it be generalized to speak of Generation X as teachers *writ large*?

Johnson and her colleagues (2004) touch on the idea that the new generation of teachers is different from its predecessors in that they entered the job market in different conditions and have different expectations about how their jobs should be performed. I hold this to be true but take it one step further: We are different from our predecessors not merely because of the context in which we enter into and remain in teaching, but by the very way in which we understand the world.

Not too long ago, research by others on the topic of who stays in and who leaves teaching focused on teacher recruitment strategies, as a looming teacher shortage seemed imminent due to the "graying" of the teacher workforce (*Teacher Magazine*, 1995; Murphy et al., 2003). Current work suggests that maintaining teacher supply is not an issue of recruitment but one of retention. Scholars of teacher retention focus on the conditions that affect teachers' retention and suggest strategies not just to bring teachers into the field but instead to ensure that those already in the field do not leave (Shen, 1997; Weiss, 1999; Ingersoll, 2001; Johnson, 2004).

I argue that teachers' career trajectories need to be reconsidered, revisioned, and indeed regenerated, to ensure that the people who are in today's classrooms remain

engaged and sustained in their work. To me, the issue is not simply one of teacher retention. The teachers with whom I spoke do not plan to leave education, although many are looking to teach in different schools. They are dedicated to their students, their jobs, their colleagues, and their schools, and their level of commitment, in their own words, is tremendous. In comparison to the research on retention, what I found is that while these teachers are staying in their careers, their career trajectories are speeded up in comparison to earlier generations. Today's middle career teachers – those with 7 to 20 years in the classroom – are experimenting less in their own classrooms, burning out earlier, and generally resigning themselves to viewing teaching as something done during school hours instead of as an around-the-clock job at a younger age and at an earlier stage than teachers before them. The reasons for this acceleration are numerous and include the standardization of teaching due to No Child Left Behind and its focus on high-stakes testing and the desire for flexible work that allows a greater work–family balance. Whatever the reasons, though, careful consideration of the ways in which Generation X teachers view their work and their careers is necessary to keep them sustained in their work. While they might not be planning to leave, they are disengaging from their work much earlier than their predecessors.

The data presented here point to the ways in which today's mid-career teachers see their career trajectories compared to previous generations. The starting point for my argument lies with Huberman's influential writing on teachers' careers (1989). Huberman identified trends in the empirical literature on the phases of teachers' careers: *survival and discovery*, in which new teachers adjust to the shock of a new career and stumble to find their footing as novices; *stabilization*, in which teachers make a commitment to teaching as a career and gain more professional freedoms as they increase their experience; *experimentation/activism*, in which teachers attempt to increase their impact through experimenting with a variety of teaching techniques and taking on new roles, all the while bumping up against institutional barriers that seek to limit that impact; *taking stock*, in which teachers face a "mid-career crisis" and struggle to stay or leave the profession; *serenity*, in which teachers begin to distances themselves from their students and experience a slow deceleration; *conservatism*, in which teachers, finding themselves so much older than their students, begin to resist innovation and feel nostalgic for the way things were; and finally *disengagement*, in which teachers transfer their energies to pursuits other than work.

Each of these stages roughly corresponds with years teaching in the field. Figure 9.1, taken from Huberman's article, lays out a schematic model of these predictable stages.

Using this model as a starting point, and continuing with my own qualitative analysis of interviews with 12 teachers in Massachusetts, I found the following trends regarding the form and shape of teachers' career trajectories.

- The experimentation/activism phase is interrupted and/or stunted.
- Serenity and conservatism begin much earlier.
- Teachers begin the process of disengagement at an earlier point in time.
- The nature of teachers' career trajectories is no longer linear.

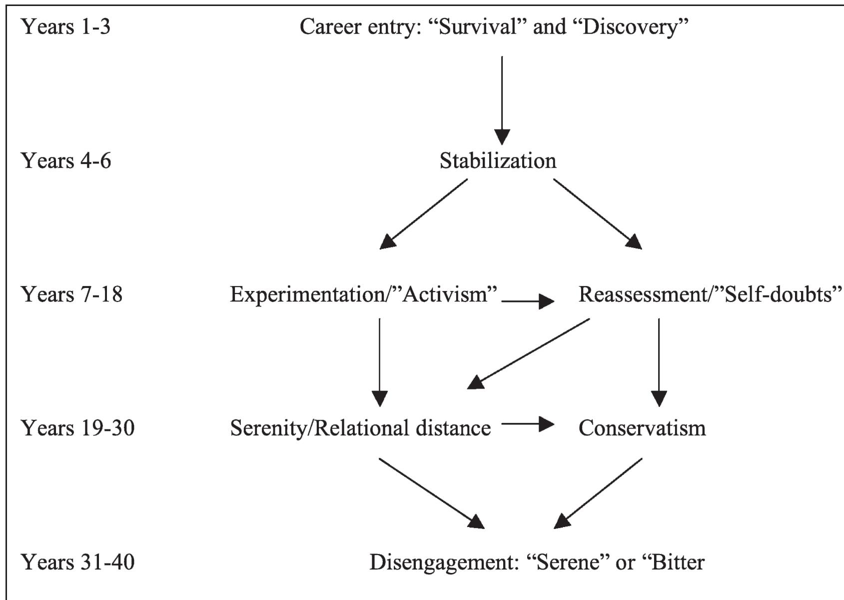

Fig. 9.1 Successive themes of the teacher career cycle: schematic model (From Huberman, 1989)

Experimentation/Activism

In Huberman's model, teachers, after passing through the early years of their new teaching careers, begin to settle in, find their sea legs and grow more confident in their abilities as teachers. Around this time, between 7 to 18 years, teachers enter a phase he calls *experimentation/activism*. Teachers start to experiment with new techniques in their classrooms, which is now possible due to their increased feelings of success and capacity as more seasoned teachers. During this time teachers may also begin to take on small leadership roles. At the same time that teachers feel increased feelings of efficacy, what stands out to Huberman during this time are also the initial stirrings of concern about growing "stale" in the profession.

For Boomer teachers, the progression from novice to growing expert was a logical and linear progression. To be a new teacher was to understand the limits of one's skills and capacities, and as one grew into one's own it made sense to become more confident, adventurous, even activist.

For Generation X teachers, however, the story has unfolded a little differently. There are both environmental and generational factors at play that influence this divergent path. First, the context in which today's middle career teachers – those in Huberman's group of 7 to 18 years – has changed dramatically. The field of teaching in the United States has become increasingly standardized (Hargreaves, 1994, 2003). While advocates of standardization argue that standards define what

is to be taught and what kind of performance is expected, that they are necessary for equality of opportunity, and that they supply accurate information to students, parents, teachers, employers, and colleges (Ravitch, 1995), others argue that standardization deskills teachers (McNeil, 2000) by limiting curricular content and the teacher's control over what is taught, as well as intensifying teachers' work so that in practice they have less rather than more time to access the expertise and support of their colleagues (Hargreaves, 2003). Teachers, in this standardized and politically intensified environment, are not encouraged to think proactively and reflectively but instead think reactively in defense of their material needs (their jobs, curricular materials). They cannot take professional risks that may help them grow but instead must work to maintain their status quo. Schools, particularly urban schools that struggle with student achievement, are urged to adopt Comprehensive Reform models that are scientifically proven (Lytle, 2000; Datnow et al., 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 2002). These models often come with scripted teachers' guides and activities for students that minimize individual teachers' contributions to the curriculum and the learning of their students while simultaneously increasing the monitoring necessary for assessment and accountability, which are more strictly checked and more closely tied to the evaluation of the school (Hargreaves, 2003).

Thus, the necessary step in a novice teacher's career growth – experimentation – is complicated by simultaneously feeling more skilled while having fewer opportunities to demonstrate such development. In Massachusetts, this change is driven by the state's high-stakes test, the MCAS. After the implementation of MCAS, in combination with the pressures of achieving Adequate Yearly Progress under *No Child Left Behind*, Harrison, whose career path I described at the beginning, said:

> I feel like they have more and more layers of administration now. Whereas before they just didn't have the bodies to closely supervise you to the point that they wanted to, now they do. And now these people have nothing else to do other than sit around and think of things for you to do. And they just give you more than is humanly possible. And I think you still have the budgetary pressures to get people at the low end of the salary scale in place to save money and they are easier to control. They're not permanent teachers, they're provisionals. A lot of them aren't even certified so you give them the scripted curriculum and they do it. It's probably the best thing for them; they don't know how to teach so you may as well. But for somebody who has a professional license, who has a degree and who has been in the business a while, it's insulting, it's just crazy.

Mike, who teaches in one of Boston's pilot schools, expressed a similar sentiment:

> I work at a Boston Public School and within the Boston System group of schools called Pilot Schools which have some autonomies, that are separate from the rest of Boston System. Autonomies around budget, hiring, curriculum, calendar, there's another autonomy somewhere but the big one for me is about curriculum and as a teacher I think that's the big difference in teaching in a pilot school versus teaching in another school. So at my school, other schools in Boston there's a set teaching guide, there's a set textbook, set curriculum for a math teacher and at my school, because of the pilot school autonomy and also because of how the leadership of my school delegates that responsibility to the teachers, I have a lot of control over what I teach, how I teach it, when I teach it. So when I originally started I kind of could do whatever I want in whatever order I wanted. That was a really exciting but sometimes frustrating thing about being a teacher. MCAS in my department has meant that we are much more obligated to follow a certain path, a certain sequence of

> events. While we still have that autonomy, while our headmaster still delegates that level of responsibility to the teachers, I feel like we're much more in line with what you would see in another school in Boston or another school in the state.

The second confounding factor is a generational difference regarding the desire to become leaders. While many teachers in previous generations moved from the classroom into administration, many Generation X teachers express a clear disdain for leadership roles, specifically high-level roles such as principal but also roles such as department chair or curriculum or testing coordinator that take them out of their classrooms and away from their students (Donaldson, 2007). Of the teachers with whom I spoke, 67% (8 out of 12) said they did not want a leadership role. Of those, a handful said they would take leadership roles that allowed them to stay in the classroom, or that they would take leadership roles in the future but not now. These teachers viewed administrative roles as taking them away from the students. Julie said:

> I'm not cut out to be an administrator. I'm not interested in organizing within schools. I'm interested in being part of the organization and part of making change but not administering it or working really primarily with adults in the building. My focus is really on kids.

Similarly, Sarah said:

> Every administrator I know is unhappy. Because unlike I think a lot of people, my interests didn't change. My interests still remain first and foremost English and second children. And you don't get to do that as an administrator and I've had people ask me why don't you and why won't you. I don't want the stress. I don't want to end up hating the kids. I don't want to end up hating; I don't want to have the teachers hate me.

The result of these two factors is that teachers are not experimenting and not taking on different roles.

Serenity and Conservatism

One typically views a move toward conservatism as a natural part of the aging process (Riseborough, 1981; Evans, 1996; Hargreaves, 2005). As teachers age, their focus often shifts from concerns at work to concerns at home. Instead of spending energy planning for the workday, older teachers begin to think about the future, about retirement, and about life after work. As such, they are less able to invest in changes or reforms occurring in their schools. This phase in Huberman's model begins after a long career in teaching, typically between 19 and 30 years.

Huberman's model both hits the nail on the head for the teachers with whom I spoke but also misses the mark. How can this be possible? Huberman suggests that in this phase of serenity moving toward conservatism, teachers experience a gradual decrease in energy that is made up for by a great sense of pride in themselves and their work over their careers. Thus, because they feel good about the work they have done and continue to do, they can begin to relax a bit and turn their energies elsewhere. This phenomenon is certainly true for the teachers in my study – but they have been teaching only between 7 and 15 years!

For those participants with families, teachers reported that their energies have turned away from school and toward home life. They no longer view their students as "their kids" as they have children of their own. Where they used to coach sports, direct plays and stay up nights working on curriculum and lesson plans, these teachers now do the minimum necessary to do their jobs well. Jim remarked:

> It's changed it an awful lot. Before I got married I was at school all the time. I was going to the dances, I was going to games, I had kids hanging out in my classroom just talking until 5:00 in the afternoon and none of that mattered. I just gave my whole life to the school. When I started dating my wife I was [head] of the drama club and so I was in the middle of the Crucible, which will henceforth be known as that damn play. And because it was taking time away from my girlfriend. So after that year, dumped the play, we got married and my time at school dropped. I don't go to dances anymore unless I have to. I do very little extra-curricular stuff that keeps me out at night. When my son was born four years ago I dropped even more. On the other hand it also made me very isolated at school because every free minute I had at school was dedicated to grading and prep work. I wanted to do as little as possible at home. So that meant no more socializing at lunch, leaving the teachers' room, hiding in my room for the grading. So that was difficult.

Mike expressed a similar sentiment:

> A lot of it is about when and how I do the work so that used to be my motto was stay in the building until 5:00, 5:30, 6:00, be as available as possible to students at every hour and go in early and stay late and now it's just not really a possibility to do it that way. You know, and then also the part that I bring home is much smaller. I used to come home and after dinner work for another two or three hours making beautiful worksheets, making beautiful curriculum. I don't know. And now I'm much more satisfied to do the best I can in a given amount of time which isn't always great but I feel like I have enough experience and enough other skills that kind of balance that out.

Sarah felt, after only 4 or 5 years, that she was able to "disconnect":

> The first day of school I put my phone number on the board and say, you never have any excuse, call me, if I don't answer the phone leave me a message, you know, like, not doing your homework isn't an option because you can call me and tell me why you can't do it, you can call me and ask me for help. Spent hundreds of dollars on books. You know, my kids like supplies, you know, pencils, putting white boards up in my room. It's just, you know, worrying, worrying about these students who … they're not, now I know, they're not mine. But it … over committed. It stressed me out … and I got to a place where I could disconnect but only after four, five years maybe and still, my husband would get so frustrated because the phone would ring, you know, eight times a night and these kids don't have phone manners. And, you know, it was just, I need help or I just called to, I mean, I had surgery and I remember when I had surgery, like, three hours afterwards the phone was ringing and my husband said, she can't talk right now. Just calling to say hi. So very committed.

It is perhaps Julie, though, who summed up the generational difference most succinctly.

> I started as an enthusiastic, dedicated teacher. Dedicated to figuring it out. And I was pretty successful early on. I could not recognize that at the time. Which I think many early teachers can't. And then I started taking on leadership roles in the school, to some extent, nothing administrative. But some leadership roles. And then I had a baby and … and I'm definitely figuring out still how to balance it and I'm kind of accepting that right now it's, while I'm there I do the best job I can do for the most part but it turns often into a totally

> different energy than it used to. But sometimes that scares me a little bit, and I think oh God, I'm slacking, I'm turning into this teacher I really don't want to be. But in some ways I think there are parts of it that are healthy. The healthiest part being that I used to call my students my kids. And they were to an extent. But now they're really not. And I still love them and develop good relationships with them etc. but they are someone else's kids. Which is a good thing.

This does not mean that they have checked out of their jobs; indeed, they still say they are highly committed. However, the hours and mental energies directed toward their work have markedly decreased.

There is also both an environmental and a generational component to this expedited process of serenity moving into conservatism. The environmental difference between the generations of teachers is a change in the scope of teachers' work. Teachers are encouraged to take on more roles, and to take them earlier, than their predecessors (Bartlett, 2004). Teachers are urged to become more collaborative (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001) and to take on leadership roles not just in their classrooms but also in their schools (Lieberman & Miller, 1999). This expanded view of the teaching role is more likely to include responsibilities outside the classroom, such as teacher involvement in directing the school's curricular, pedagogical, and assessment programs.

The teachers with whom I spoke have begun to move away from taking these once prized roles. While they used to direct plays and run student government, they now leave at the closing bell. They also took on these roles earlier in their careers, and have come to appreciate their roles as simply classroom teachers and not teacher leaders.

Generationally speaking, one of the defining characteristics of Generation X is a trend toward later marriage and family life as well as more job shifts than generations prior. Teachers used to enter the field after graduating college and begin their families earlier. A teacher with 19 years of experience might have been close to the age of 40. Today's middle career teachers, however, have often come to teaching from other lines of work and are thus older "earlier" in their career trajectories. A teacher who is 40 may have only been teaching 10 or 12 years, or even fewer. If the trend toward conservatism is a function of one's age, then it makes sense that today's mid-career teachers' trajectories more closely resemble later stage teachers' career trajectories from the prior generations.

A New Trajectory

The differences in the phases of teachers' careers as described above have both generational as well as environmental components. The context in which teachers work today is different than in past generations, largely due to the current focus on standardization and high-stakes testing. These differences are not necessarily permanent, though – educational change is a continuous process and the experiences that teachers have in their classrooms over time undoubtedly change with

the times. What *is* permanently different is the generational makeup of teachers as time progresses. No matter what happens, new generations of teachers will enter into, work in, and leave teaching. These teachers will have different worldviews and understandings about life and careers than the generation before them, and understanding these varying viewpoints is a necessary step in understanding how teachers approach their work.

At present, perhaps the greatest generational difference that I found is the shape of the teaching career. Today's middle career teachers, largely members of Generation X, view work very differently from their predecessors and even from their successors. Huberman's model suggests that teachers' careers are shaped in a predictable and almost linear pattern. While Huberman's schematic does have differing pathways for teachers depending on their classroom experiences, there is a clear entry point, a clear departure point, and a fairly predictable middle section.

I found several differences in this pattern with the teachers with whom I spoke. First, the path is not as linear as it was in the past. Generation Xers do not view careers in a linear fashion: many of the teachers began their careers in other fields, many planned to leave the classroom for other jobs in education, and several were out of the workplace or only working part-time so that they could raise their families. Max raised this point in his conversation with me:

> I think that we think of our work differently but not necessarily in terms of privilege. I think we think of it differently because of the way that things work. I think it used to be the case that it was sort of expected and companies or organizations would sort of want you to come and stay and help build an organization or help build a company and now the incentive is not necessarily to stay. There's more incentive I think to jump around quite often because there's nothing really built in to help people build ownership and build, build up more value as they build time in a certain job.

Second, as I touched on above, the path is speeded up. This change is partly generational but also partly societal. Generation X had to grow up early, with their parents off at work and being left home after school to fend for themselves, and it appears that they are aging early as well. When asked about their generational identity, teachers even said that they felt older than their peers. Doug said, when asked about his generational identity:

> I feel like I'm right on the cusp to some extent, there's some Gen-X stuff but I also feel like I'm a little bit older. So there's a certain traditionalism. I don't know what you call the generation before Generation X but I feel like it's a mix … I feel like a lot of my political opinions and a lot of how I make my own decisions are based on older issues. So, for example, a point of comparison for me is Viet Nam. Even though I'm not old enough to remember Viet Nam, because my parents were so impacted by it I feel like that's sort of my foundational point of comparison.

Max said: "I think I'm too old to be Generation X." Jim, too, felt older than his peers:

> I would've been comfortable in a classroom maybe 40 years ago. The level of expectations I have for my students, the level of work I give them, not the old fashioned way of teaching but definitely the expectations for student learning are, I think, very much out of step with the direction education is going these days.

Gleick (2000) writes that our society's understanding of time, as a concept, has shifted, and that is because of our increased education levels and wealth, we have a sense that we do not have enough time and this feeling causes tension. Time, as Gleick points out, is seen as a "negative status symbol": The more a person has, the less important he or she must be (p. 155). The very way we exist has speeded up; we buy pre-washed blue jeans because we do not have the patience to let them fade on their own. The door close button on the elevator is the most worn out, as we do not even have 10 extra seconds to spare to wait for the doors to close by themselves. This phenomenon of accelerated time is clearly present in the changed view of the teaching career as well. The teachers with whom I spoke are throwing themselves full-speed into their careers at an early stage, but they are burning out faster as well.

Particularly in an era of mandated reform and standardization, where expectations are raised for teachers in terms of performance and accountability, stress on teachers can lead to burnout (Smylie, 1999). Teachers may also burn out because they believe that teaching is a moral job; they take on more and more roles that they cannot handle because they feel that not doing so would let their students down (Bartlett, 2004).

Burnout theory suggests that teachers who burn out try to do well and "attempt desperately to succeed against all odds, risking their physical health and neglecting their personal lives to maximize the probability of professional success" (Farber, 1981, p. 328). Such teachers will not let their practice slide, and they leave teaching rather than allowing it to do so. Farber (1981, p. 328) also suggests that a separate phenomenon may be at play; teachers are worn out, not burned out – "Instead of burning out from overwork, they turn off to the job and stop attempting to succeed in situations that appear hopeless." These worn out teachers have experienced blows to their self-esteem, and have lost their desire to maintain the highest levels of performance; they do not necessarily leave the classroom, however.

Sarah talked about feeling burned out:

> Yes. I mean, if I wouldn't have had her (daughter), well, I would've taught I just couldn't stay where I was. It was just too dysfunctional. Too, I mean, it was like I was walking in to school every day and my analogy was like, I was just walking in, just trying to get in my classroom so I could help the kids and it was, like, different people were just, like, throwing things at me trying to stop me from getting there. It was just so hard. I was fighting so many things that weren't my job. You know, it didn't seem worth it anymore. So I would've gone to a different school but I would've bagged groceries before I would've gone back there. And I loved the kids, loved the kids.

Mike also spoke about the phenomenon of burning out:

> I always felt like education is such a demanding field that I could burn out really, really quickly and I've always left myself open to that possibility so I think that I could but I don't like to look too far ahead. I think my level of energy for the work has changed. The pace of how I do it has changed but I still feel energized by the teaching part.

It is clear to me in speaking with these teachers that something very different is happening in their careers, something that is on the one hand burning them out early yet at the same time keeping them in the classrooms. These teachers are going through the same stations, as Strauss and Howe (1991) suggest, that other teachers in the past have gone through, only they are on bullet trains, not steam locomotives. The ways in

which school leaders and teacher education programs attend to this difference is critical to finding ways to keep these teachers satisfied as they remain in the workplace.

Leadership and Preparation for a New Generation of Teachers

The teachers in my study do not dislike teaching. In fact, they quite enjoy being around their students and feel great pride that they are finally reaching a great number of students and doing a fairly good job of doing so. Even so, they express a sense of early disengagement with their careers. They work less hard, in part because they are more experienced but also in part because they are just tired.

There are two issues facing this unique generation of teachers. The first is one of leadership. Of the teachers who plan to remain in teaching, many do not plan to become administrators. This situation creates a twofold problem. One, there is a certain level of disdain for administrators, who are viewed as out of touch with the students. Two, there will be a significant leadership gap when the Boomer-generation leaders leave and no one with experience in classrooms is there to fill their positions. This problem is one of both leadership and preparation, and it must be addressed to ensure that today's mid-career teachers can stay happy in their present roles but also progress in a productive way to leadership. Given what I have learned in speaking with teachers, I make the following suggestions.

First, generational research suggests that Generation X teachers are driven to leadership roles by altruistic reasons, not the desire for power (Zemke et al., 2000; Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Raines, 2003; Lovely & Buffum, 2007). Distributed leadership that empowers teachers to lead and allows them to feel they are directly helping their students while not necessarily taking them out of their classrooms would both put teachers in positions of power and give them a sense that they are not losing time with their students (Harris & Muijs, 2004; Spillane et al., 2001). The type of leadership that teachers seem to disdain is the top-down kind, the kind that has one person at the top making every decision, a more power-based position than an altruistic one. Teachers also said they did not want to get bogged down in the politics of the school but instead wanted to be closely involved in the learning. While these two (politics and learning) are not by nature mutually exclusive, any moves to bring them closer together in ways that teachers view as helpful would bring experienced teachers into leadership roles.

Second, recent research on teacher leadership suggests that the teachers who remain the most engaged are those who are paid well for the work they do which they consider above and beyond their job descriptions (Bartlett, 2004). Extra pay for extra work is one avenue, as is giving teachers fewer classes to teach as they take on additional roles. Several of the teachers I talked to said they would consider leadership roles that allowed them to spend most of their time in the classroom and not in the front office. One perception of Generation X is that they want to have their cake and eat it, too. By giving them the opportunity to experience leadership

while continuing to teach, school leaders might be able to bring a greater number of these teachers into leadership roles.

Of course, the general reluctance of teachers to move to administration is still a concern. Even with distributed leadership, the fact remains that many Generation X teachers simply do not want to be principals. They will assume leadership roles but not the general leadership of a school, or for that matter, a school district. For these teachers, a fundamental shift in how administration is viewed may be the only way to move experienced teachers into principalships. Distributed leadership can both allow teachers to share in the administration of school while remaining in their classrooms and allow them, if they become leaders, to keep a foothold in the more routine aspects of leadership instead of wholly immersing them in the more political aspects of the school.

The second issue facing this generation of teachers is one of sustainability. Generation X teachers will remain in their careers, but what can be done, both by the teachers themselves and by the leaders who work with them, to ensure that they remain engaged in their careers, especially if they do not plan to move into leadership positions? Generation X teachers appear to be burning out years before the generations of teachers before them, but they are not necessarily leaving teaching. In order to keep teachers sustained in their work, school leaders need to consider several factors. First, do these teachers need new types of work to stimulate their careers? Can they be given new courses to teach, or new groups of students? Teachers in mid-career are finally feeling good about the work they can do after years of learning the ropes. There is a fine balance to be achieved between asking teachers to take on new work that stimulates them, asking them to give up what they feel effective doing, and being mindful not to overload them. For teachers who are already beginning to experience burnout, taking on new work might seem not to be a stimulus but instead to be a drain. Asking teachers directly where their interests lie and working with them to create change in their work would be an ideal first step in this process.

Equally important, especially to Generation X teachers, is flexibility. This generation of teachers is highly dedicated to their students but also strongly family-oriented. They want the ability to keep their jobs while making time to spend with their own children. Several of the teachers I talked to were either currently out of the classroom to raise their children, working reduced schedules to accommodate family concerns, or consciously holding off on making moves either to different schools or to leadership roles while raising their families. This was true of both men and women. School leaders must be mindful that this generation, having been raised as latchkey children, is conscious of wanting to spend more time with their children, and their career trajectories may not be linear as in previous generations. Allowing teachers the flexibility to shift their careers in ways that best suit their needs is a critical component of keeping these teachers in the classroom. Generation X teachers, already prepared to leave any job that does not conform to their desires, may be better able to commit to staying in their jobs if they are reassured that their job will be there if they take time off for family. Departments may look different as teachers cycle in and out of positions, and strong leadership involves building strong teams with multiple strengths to accommodate these shifts.

Concluding Thoughts

This chapter examines the career trajectories of Generation X teachers using both a review of the literature on generations and in-depth qualitative interviews with 12 teachers. The analysis reveals several interesting points about how the career trajectories of these teachers are different than those of past generations. First, while teachers appear to be going through the same phases, the times at which they do so are different. Second, the shape of the trajectory is itself different. What used to seem a simple, straightforward and linear path from entry into the classroom to retirement is now more fluid.

Understanding these two points is important for at least two reasons. First is the notion of regenerating teachers. The way we see teachers needs to be "regenerated" so that we can meet their different needs and ensure that they stay and remain engaged in their careers and their work. Prior work about teachers' careers was conducted both by and about a different generation of teachers, and in order to understand how today's teachers differ it is necessary to view them and understand them differently.

Second is sustaining teachers. If teachers are committed to staying in their classrooms, then it is crucial to ensure that they do not burn out too soon. Generation X teachers in mid-career are already beginning to feel the early stages of burn-out. Working with them to meet their needs is a critical component of making sure that they remain pleased with the work they are presently doing and the work they hope to do.

By taking a generational approach to viewing teachers' career trajectories, this chapter opens up a new avenue of understanding the teaching career. While further research is necessary, it is an initial step in regenerating our knowledge about who is teaching and why they do or do not remain in the classroom and for what reasons. As the next generation of teachers, the Millennials/Generation Y, enters the teaching force, it will certainly be interesting to see how they view their careers and work as well.

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