



## Changing Course: Reflections of Second-Career Teachers

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This study examined the phenomenon of second-career teachers. The participants in this study shared their reflections concerning the motivating factors and common experiences associated with leaving established professions in order to pursue careers in teaching. The study also inquired into the process involved in professional preparation as well as in assimilating to the culture of schools. The participants in this study indicated several reasons for changing careers such as the need for more meaningful work, a more flexible and family-friendly schedule, and the desire to share their experiences with the younger generation. Many of the participants also discussed a sense of religious calling. Hardships faced by second-career teachers are discussed, along with an examination of the strengths and weaknesses of teacher education programs as they relate to second-career teacher candidates. Reflections concerning the participants' current teaching practices are also examined.

*Keywords:* second-career teachers, late-entry teachers, career-changers, qualitative

### **Hermeneutics, Interviews**

Changing careers is a relatively new phenomenon among working professionals. In the past, a career was likely to be characterized by an employee seeking to stay with a single company for the duration of one's working life. Leading theorists from the 1950s through the 1970s continued to support this traditional understanding of career (Super, 1957; Levinson, 1978). By contrast, recent trends indicate the prevalence of the so-called "boundaryless career," where one may change professions many times over the course of a working lifetime (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). Some have argued that the very nature of work has changed in modern society due to a number of factors including technology, globalism, and economics (Sullivan & Emerson, 2000; Chope, 2001). These factors have led to the emergence of the career changing worker who has traded the "company man" mentality of the past for the

free-agent approach of the present. Conversely, Valcour and Tolbert (2003) found that boundaryless careers tend to work well for women, due to a number of factors including time off for child bearing and raising and moving due to a spouse's career. The study also found that these types of career paths do not serve men well as they are more likely to stay with one company while seeking promotions within the organization. It is also important to note that little research has been done to look at the effects of the changing nature of careers upon minority populations (Sullivan, 1999).

Some career changers are looking for work that may be more fulfilling and personally satisfying than their original choice of profession. For example, Jung (1933) believed that a mid-life crossroads was common for the worker, and at this point one would choose to change careers toward a profession that mirrors one's belief

systems and personal goals. Holland's (1972) groundbreaking work on the nature of careers stated that people gravitate toward types of work that are compatible with their personalities and are more satisfied once they have settled in such a job, becoming far less likely to switch careers in the future. This theory provides a possible explanation for those second-career teachers who have given up what are often well paying professions to seek a career more in line with personality traits and value systems. However, Thomas and Robbins (1979) asserted that those who moved into what they labeled as congruent careers were no more likely to remain in those careers after five years than those in non-congruent careers. Certainly, there are implications here for the second-career teacher who enters the profession believing it to be more in line with his or her personality. Thomas and Robbins went on to speculate that one's profession holds less importance after a middle point in life and that changes in profession are just as likely to be influenced by the need for more leisure time as it is by a need for an alignment of profession with values and beliefs. Just as there are different reasons for changing careers, there are also different results. Not all adults experience a seamless transition from one career to another, even if the second career is something that the career changer has always dreamed about doing. Lewis (1996) pointed out the obstacles faced by many older career changers in the quest to pursue a second career, including considerable investment of time and money as they prepare for a new profession. By contrast, younger career changers are often suffering from negative self-images and a lack of information "not only on occupations, but also within their own interests and skills" (Lucas, 1999, p. 117).

### **Rationale for Study**

There is much to be gained from a scholarly investigation of individuals who have chosen teaching as a second profession. For example, there may be advantages that a mature, non-traditional teaching applicant has over the recent college-aged graduate who enters the profession. Investigating a sample of this population provided data that may be useful for teacher education programs as they seek to provide learning experiences designed to best train these unique educators by emphasizing the value of prior work experiences in the preparation process. In addition, school administrators may find the results of this study useful in recognizing the strengths of this population of teachers, which is clearly different from the traditional entrant to the teaching profession. Finally, this study may be useful to second-career teachers themselves as they learn how experienced second-career teachers have been able to weave prior work experiences into the practice of teaching. Second-career teachers often have vastly different experiences rooted in many other professions (Brady, 1997; Wolpert-Gawron, 2008) and may have a unique set of experiences that allows them to adjust more easily to the demands of the teaching profession. Career changers often bring a lifetime of knowledge and work experience that

may have a profound effect on themselves, their colleagues, and their students. It is also plausible that an older beginning teacher, with diverse work experiences, may have a stronger appreciation of the profession. In many cases, these older novice teachers have raised families and have considerable experience dealing with children prior to serving as a teacher.

### **Literature Review**

Second-career teachers are different from most new college graduates. As Resta, Huling, and Rainwater (2001) have pointed out, "midcareer individuals bring many strengths to teaching, including maturity, life experience, and good work habits" (p. 61). The retention rate for these teachers is also much better than that of their counterparts. Rather than gain these attributes as most traditional teachers do, in the first difficult year of teaching as a young person starting their first job, these career changers are ready for the task. Many of these teachers are eager to utilize what they have learned in prior careers and teach the values of democracy in their classrooms (Unterreiner, 2006).

Most teacher candidates who seek to enter the teaching profession as a mid-career transition choose to do so by way of non-traditional teacher education programs. These non-traditional programs can focus purely upon preparing career changers to apply what they already know to a new situation. Some of these career changers give up professions that pay considerably better and have more benefits than teaching (Peske, Liu, Kaufman, & Kardos, 2001). There are also suggestions that employers draw upon the paraprofessional ranks for new, but experienced, teaching candidates. In fact, a number of school districts are working in conjunction with teacher education departments to create flexible certification programs in order to prepare these potential teachers (Villegas & Clewell, 2001). Conversely, other districts are partnering with local colleges to ensure that quality mentoring and residency programs are in place, especially in hard-to-staff urban schools (Hueser & Owens, 1999; Keller, 2006; Chin & Young, 2004). Such programs help to guarantee not only that better and more diverse teacher candidates enter the classroom, but also increases the likelihood that they will stay there. These measures become imperative in high turnover schools, which are more likely to hire inexperienced teachers.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study draws upon four major theorists in an effort to understand the motivations of career changers who have chosen teaching as a second profession. These theories include Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which asserts that lower level basic needs must first be met before an individual can progress to higher order needs, such as self-esteem and self-actualization; Alderfer's Existence, Relatedness, and Growth (ERG) theory which proposes that when an individual fails to obtain higher order needs, he will work doubly hard at establishing lower order needs; Herzberg's Hygiene and Motivational Factors, which is a

variation of Maslow as it relates to the workplace; and Levinson's Adult Development Theory, which identifies the stages in a man's (later expanded to woman's) life, including within the workplace. These four theories are interrelated and will serve to form a theoretical framework for this study of the perceptions of second career teachers.

### **Motivation to Teach**

A recent study by the Woodrow Wilson Foundation (2008) found in a nationwide survey of almost 2,300 adults aged 24 to 60; a full 42% would consider teaching as a second career. This number is in spite of the many high profile problems with the profession that have been highlighted by the news and entertainment media over recent decades. These second-career teachers share some of the motivating factors that lead traditional age students to choose education as a future career, as well as different and unique factors that set them apart. Snyder, Doerr, and Pastor (1995) surveyed 3,000 pre-service teachers, including significant numbers of career changers, and found that most were interested in the profession because of an interest in and a love for young people. With regards to older students seeking teaching as a second career, most had the benefit of children of their own and saw "teaching as an end in itself, rather than as a means to some other professional end" (p. 9). Redden (2008) adds that those with degrees in engineering and science, as well as those with graduate degrees, are increasingly becoming interested in teaching as a second career. This is good news considering the current shortages in science and math fields and the prevalence of out-of-field teachers in these areas (NCES, 2005).

Second-career teachers also differ from traditional age entrants in the area of influential factors leading to teaching. For example, traditional age pre-service teachers were often strongly influenced by a former teacher or by those in the family who are teachers. By contrast, second-career teachers are more likely to be influenced by value systems and other intrinsic motivators as well as by prior work experiences (Powell, 1994). In addition, many of these teachers had extensive experience with children as most have raised children of their own. Other studies have shown that additional factors also contribute to the decisions of those who choose to change careers in order to become teachers. Richardson and Watt (2005) found that a desire for security, more time with family, and a sense of calling were significant reasons why non-traditional teachers were leaving their jobs and steady incomes in order to prepare to become a teacher. They went on to indicate that these teachers were realistic and prepared for the demands of the job and were not dissuaded by the perceived lowly status of the profession.

Novak and Knowles (1992) asserted that second-career teachers were as equally overwhelmed by the realities of the classroom as traditional age first year teachers. The authors contended that the subjects in their study had erroneously believed that prior, but unrelated,

work experience would immediately transfer to the classroom and it did not. These teachers needed mentoring and adjustment time just like other novice teachers. However, they were eventually able to incorporate prior experiences into their classrooms effectively after an appropriate amount of time settling into their new jobs. The study points out the need for teacher education programs to teach these students how to tap into these prior experiences.

### **Preparation**

Some researchers suggested the need for change in teacher education programs in order to attract career changers (Suell & Piotrowski, 2007; Hale & Chowning, 1999). Others called for changes to teacher education programs to be adapted to the specific needs of older, work experienced career changers, including a challenging and accelerated curriculum (Project Innovation, 1999). These older candidates, who enter graduate school already with a lifetime of diverse experience, need programs tailored to them as students who are very different from traditional age college students. In another study of second-career pre-service science teachers, Bohning, Hale, and Chowning (1999) found that these teachers were anxious about the content to be taught more than concerns over learning to teach. The authors theorized that these teachers had been able to develop beyond the concerns common to most pre-service teachers much earlier than traditional candidates do.

An emerging theme among much of the literature is the need to attract older and diverse candidates into teacher education programs while retooling these programs to meet the needs of these potential teachers (ERS e-Bulletin, 2008; Reichardt, 2001; Shroeder, 2002). Clearly, there are concerns that are unique to this group of teachers that are different from their younger counterparts, such as balancing current work schedules with school and meeting the demands of family responsibilities. Bray (1995) looked at the perceptions of three groups of students as they cycled through a traditional teacher education program: traditional college students, older returning students, and career changers. This study found that there is a need for individualization in teacher education programs that would allow some customization to meet the needs of non-traditional students, including a re-design of the typical student teaching experience.

Kolb (1984) argued for the incorporation of experiential learning as a key component in viewing personal development as process, rather than product. Key to this approach is the understanding that, as new experiences are acquired, the learner should reflect and then modify behavior based on new information. This approach would benefit the pre-service teacher candidate, as well as the in-service teacher, as it requires continuous reflection, evaluation, and adjustment. Schon (1983) advocated a reflection-in-action practice in which "doing and thinking are complimentary" (p. 280). Only through constant reflection and adjustment does the practitioner substantively

grow in the chosen profession. Such practices are becoming increasingly interwoven into teacher education programs seeking to provide meaningful and abiding experiences in addition to theory.

### **Transition to the Classroom**

Once they have gained credentials, teachers find a classroom that is often very different from what they expected. Some teachers note that the transition is not as smooth as they might have anticipated (Bulloch & Knowles, 1990) and that teaching is more difficult than they expected. In fact, many second-career teachers' perceptions of the teaching profession and of themselves as a teacher begin to alter after some time in the classroom (Freidus & Krasnow, 1991).

Teaching has traditionally been a relatively lonely profession with teachers closing the door of their classrooms and having little time to interact with peers. Yet, this collegiality is of extra importance to the second-career teacher, many of whom enter the teaching profession from the business world with its work teams and collaborative projects. Roy (2002) emphasized the importance of developing cohorts of colleagues as these second-career teachers transition from college to the classroom. The author also encouraged the maintenance of online communities in which new entrants to the teaching profession can stay in contact with other second-career teachers to share frustrations, victories, advice, and other messages of support. The opportunity to establish peer support networks would likely benefit novice second-career teachers immensely and eases the transition into a new work setting, complete with its own unique culture and norms.

### **Gender and Age**

Several interesting studies have considered the role of gender in the selection of teaching as a second career. Both men and women who had originally rejected teaching considered the major as an easy path to a college degree and a career for the non-ambitious (Lerner & Zittleman, 2002). Freidus (1989) examined the degree to which gender plays a role in the decision of career changers choosing education. In a follow-up study (1990), Freidus conducted case studies of four second-career teachers with a specific emphasis upon gender roles and societal expectations. The study found that a world view constructed in early years, while still living at home, had a profound impact upon career decisions, and later, the decision to change careers.

Increasingly, college graduates are looking to the field of teaching as a viable career alternative. Some have decided to turn their backs on the corporate world and look for a career with meaning (Brady, 1997). Even later in life some, who have been quite successful in other careers having earned recognition and handsome salaries, have the desire to impact and serve society in professions such as nursing, teaching, and fire-fighting. Gender and age seem to be less important when determining the reasons why

those with established careers choose to change course to become teachers.

### **Teacher Identity**

Other researchers have called for the need to help second-career teachers develop a teacher identity in order to establish roots in the profession. Allen (2005) made the point that second-career teachers need time to reflect upon life histories and to adapt to the profession in order to properly form a new identity, rather than the traditional baptism by fire that is common to most beginning teachers. An important, but often ignored, component of teaching is developing an identity as a teacher. This identity formation is a process that often takes a great deal of time and likely involves a shift away from idealism and naiveté toward survival mode in the first year of teaching toward reflective practice as one gains experience. The second-career teacher is not spared this often painful process (Bullough & Knowles, 1990). Yet, the degree to which second-career teachers are able to adapt and develop an individual and unique teacher identity may be shaped considerably by prior working experiences.

### **Teacher Certification**

Licensure and certification have also become daunting challenges to the potential second-career teacher. As if going back to school while trying to fulfill the obligations of adult life aren't enough, many states have created excessively bureaucratic hoops that one must repeatedly jump through in order to teach. As Peske, et al. (2001) stated:

Currently, there are two competing views about how to best prepare, license, and hire teachers in the years ahead. One calls for extensive pre-service preparation and rigorous, enforced certification requirements. The other argues for opening many routes to teaching and deregulating teacher certification (p. 310).

The authors contended that each approach has severe limitations as stand alone policies and propose a "mixed model" approach to teacher certification. In addition, Serotkin (2007) pointed out the need for "more field placement and a longer pre- and post-certification training experience" (p. 211). Harrell and Harris (2006) highlighted an innovative online certification program with high admissions standards, a rigorous curriculum, and a success rate in preparing non-traditional candidates that is hard to dispute. This program, and those like it, has gained broad appeal because of its market based approach that maintains the integrity of the licensure process while encouraging non-traditional candidates to apply.

### **Attrition and Retention**

If a person can make the decision to walk away from one career after spending many years establishing a place in the working world, it is plausible that some may choose to change professions again once they have become teachers. Furthermore, it is possible that constant teacher turnover has a negative effect on student motivation and

performance. Bird (2004) found that teachers who leave the profession within the first five years do so because of being overworked and beaten down by disruptive student behavior. In addition, many second-career teachers are simply not prepared for the demands of both the students and the administrative tasks of teaching (Denny, 2007). Johnson and Birkeland (2002) found that second-career, alternatively prepared teachers were much more likely to leave the profession than those who were prepared by traditional programs at the customary college age. Salary and work conditions were the major contributors to most of these decisions to leave, along with the lowly status associated with the teaching profession.

On the other hand, teachers who see the profession as a “calling” are willing to juggle the various demands between their personal and professional lives, understanding that teaching is a difficult line of work (Weasmer, 2002). Even in the challenging setting of hard-to-staff urban schools, which are often rife with violence, underfunded, and offer poor working conditions, many second-career teachers make the decision to stay. Induction programs can be designed that foster the growth of teachers who have chosen the most difficult assignments and incentives created to keep teachers in these schools with children who need the consistency of teachers with a long term commitment (Jorissen, 2003). Another study contended that “people entering teaching through alternate routes who are in their 40s or 50s are the most committed to staying in teaching for 10 or more years” (Feistritz, 2005, p. 33).

Teachers, in any setting, who are given the time and encouragement to develop a reflective practice, are also much more likely to stay in the profession for many years. Duck (2000) suggested learning to reflect “on growth toward the profession and planning for growth within the profession” as a means for creating the endurance and freshness to sustain a career in education (p. 42). Ultimately, second-career teachers make the decision to stay in the classroom based on a desire to grow as an individual, find a career that is congruent with family responsibilities, and because they want to make a difference (Hedrick, 2005). When these teachers find a setting that allows them to accomplish these objectives, they are far more likely to stay with the profession.

### **Methodology**

#### **Goals of the Study**

This study was designed to examine the motivations, experiences, and perceptions of second-career teachers who are at different stages in their teaching careers. Specifically, the study sought to discover the motivations to become a teacher, entry experiences, and challenges faced during the process from the perspective of the non-traditional teacher. The literature indicates that these unique teachers are different from their peers who entered the profession through the usual route and at the traditional age.

#### **Guiding Questions**

The development of a sound set of guiding questions is critical in any form of qualitative research. Ary, Jacobs, and Razavieh (2006) emphasized developing questions before settling on the specific qualitative approach to gathering data. Particularizing questions are those which focus upon describing and then interpreting a given phenomenon and processing questions focus upon how a phenomenon takes place. Both types of questions were employed in this study. In order to understand the phenomena surrounding second-career teachers, the following research questions were developed:

1. What motivating events precipitated a change of career to education?
2. What common experiences do these teachers share that may be unique to non-traditional entrants to the field of education?
3. Do these teachers believe that the teacher education and/or alternative certification process helped them learn to utilize their prior work experiences?
4. How have these teachers’ previous careers guided and/or benefited them in their new profession?
5. What degree of satisfaction have these teachers found in their new profession?

#### **Design of the Study**

**Hermeneutics.** The method of research chosen for this study was hermeneutic phenomenology. This particular method is “concerned with the life world or human experience as it is lived” (Laverty, 2003, p. 7). The study sought to uncover the essence of the experiences of those entering teaching from previous careers. The language used by the participants in recorded interviews becomes particularly important using this method. Gadamer (1975) referred to the “bond” between understanding and subject knowledge, in this case the skills and experiences acquired in a prior profession. The deeper meaning of these experiences is what hermeneutics seeks to uncover.

Hermeneutics attempts to derive meaning of phenomena through language. Heidegger (1927) asserted that the researcher’s own experiences are an integral component in the process of interpreting the meaning of phenomena. These experiences should be used as a lens by which the researcher may view the data as it relates to the event or phenomenon. As Laverty (2003) pointed out, “a hermeneutical approach asks the researcher to engage in a process of self-reflection...specifically, the biases and assumptions of the researcher are not bracketed or set aside, but rather are embedded and essential to the interpretive process” (p. 17).

#### **Site Description and Demographics**

The sample of twelve teachers were from six schools in the state of Georgia, one junior college, two high schools, two middle schools, and one elementary school spanning five non-adjacent counties. These teachers

represented schools from urban, rural, and suburban settings. The researcher found subjects that represented a good cross section of teachers who were assigned to ethnically diverse classrooms. Many of these teachers also served special education students. The schools ranged in size from 700 students to over 1500 students.

### **Sampling Procedures**

The intent of this study was to find a sample of twelve diverse career changers working on different grade levels from kindergarten to college and in diverse subject matter, in different schools and school districts, with an experience range from pre-service to 20-plus years of service. The participants for this study were purposefully chosen using two methods. First, the researcher selected teachers whom he knew had a minimum of three years of work experiences prior to becoming a teacher. Second, the researcher utilized a method that Groenewald (2004) referred to as *snowballing*, in which one participant suggests another potential participant. This recommendation led to the 12 diverse candidates highlighted in this study. Purposeful sampling was most appropriate for this study as confirmed in Patton's (2002) assertion that "information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research" (p. 46). In purposeful sampling for this study, it was important to consider individuals who would provide a number of perspectives, but most importantly, an opportunity to learn about the phenomenon from this population of teachers (Stake, 2005).

It was important to include teachers at the high range of experience continuum as they might provide insight into the experience of teaching well beyond what would be the customary teacher retirement age. Three of the subjects gained certification by a means other than a graduate level program in the form of the Georgia Teacher Alternative Preparation Program, or TAPP. This program allows career changers to enter the classroom on a provisional basis, at a reduced level of pay, and teach under the direction of a mentor while gaining full certification.

In terms of selecting participants, Moustakas (1994) pointed out that it is essential that "the research participant has experienced the phenomenon, is intensely interested in understanding its nature and meanings, and is willing to participate" in the various methods required to gather the data (p. 107). Those who were a part of this study met these criteria. They were a diverse group of teachers who were interested in how they got where they are and how they could reflect upon and utilize those past experiences in order to help them be better teachers.

### **Overview of Participants**

This study sought to examine second-career teachers with a diversity of prior careers who are now serving in different educational roles. Silverman (2006) advised that the qualitative researcher first determine the "parameters of the population that we are interested in and

choose our sample case carefully on this basis" (p. 306). All participants in this study were classroom teachers in the state of Georgia (see *Figure 1*). Teaching experience for this group ranged from one to 20 years on elementary, middle, high school, and collegiate levels. Four of the participants were male, eight were female, all but two were Caucasian. Eight of the participants were high school teachers, two taught at the middle school level, one was a college instructor, and one was an elementary teacher. All of the teachers in this study were teaching in schools where they were responsible for multiple classes, grade levels, and subject matter. The study was designed to focus upon unique experiences prior to becoming a teacher, while in professional preparation, in the early transition phase, and then at the respective points in their individual careers.

All of the participants had at least three years of previous professional experience outside of the field of education prior to entering the classroom. Previous career fields varied considerably with an average of 10 years spent in the prior career before choosing to become a teacher. Three of the 12 participants had spouses who were teachers and instrumental in the decision to become a teacher. Five of the participants reported having always wanted to be a teacher, but having avoided the profession for reasons such as better pay and more prestige. Four mentioned the required education methods classes having been a dissuading factor while considering the field in college.

### **Findings**

#### **Interviews**

The interviews were audio recorded with each initial interview lasting approximately one hour and each follow-up interview lasting approximately 30 minutes. These recordings were then transcribed verbatim over a period of several weeks. The researcher made the decision to leave the interviews essentially unedited in order for the reader to clearly understand the entirety of the response, along with the accompanying emotion, enthusiasm, and misgivings concerning each question. There was some redundancy in the interview responses, along with the occasional digression or diatribe. However, it was important to allow the participants to address the question without editing from the writer. Initial interviews were coded in order to identify emergent themes. Focused follow-up interviews, based upon the themes, were then conducted. The result of these interviews is approximately 20 hours of taped conversations.

#### **Group Analysis**

The twelve participants chosen for this study ranged in ages from 30 to 55 years, with a median age of 41.5 years. The variety of previous careers included a financial analyst, social worker, police officer, stockbroker, graphic designer, juvenile justice counselor, retail manager, seamstress, minister, prison counselor, and an office worker in a manufacturing setting. These careers ranged from three years in duration to over 33 years, with a mean of 10.5 years spent in the previous profession before

<i>Name</i>	<i>Prior Career</i>	<i>Yrs. In Prior Career</i>	<i>Now Teaching</i>	<i>Years Teaching</i>
Andrea	Finance	3 years	HS Vocational	5 years
Anna	Graphic Design	10 years	Elementary	<1 year
Chad	Juvenile Justice	6 years	MS Physical Ed	5 years
Chuck	Stock Broker	3 years	HS Special Ed	15 years
Hilary	Counselor	3 years	HS English	7 years
Janet	Manufacturing	10 years	MS Special Ed	8 years
Marjorie	Seamstress	10 years	HS Drama	20 years
Rhonda	Peace Corps	3 years	College Math	4 years
Rick	Retail Manager	33 years	HS Civics	3 years
Sara	Ministry	24 years	HS History	6 years
Susan	Social Worker	9 years	HS Guidance	12 years
Thomas	Police Officer	13 years	HS Vocational	3 years

Figure 1. List of Participants

beginning the process of becoming a teacher. The method by which these second-career teachers gained certification also varied significantly with three of the participants seeking alternative certification through the state department of education, eight obtaining certification through a formal graduate degree program, and one teaching on a collegiate level and not requiring a state license. The average time spent acquiring teacher

certification, whether through graduate school or state operated programs, was 2.8 years. Eight of the participants worked in public high school settings, two in public middle schools, one in a public elementary school, and one in a private vocational college setting. These participants ranged in teaching experience from three to 20 years with a mean of 7.3 years.

<b>Second-Career Teachers</b>	Average age	Average years of prior work experience	Average time spent acquiring teaching credentials	Average years of teaching experience
<i>Participants</i>	41.5 years	10.5 years	2.8 years	7.3 years

Figure 2. Group Analysis

## **Themes**

Over the course of the data collection process, six themes emerged from the initial and detailed coding categories. These themes were consistent across the initial and follow-up interviews with the 12 participants. These themes are as follows:

1. Reflection: The Value of Prior Experiences
2. Inspiration: Factors Motivating Change
3. Preparation: Teacher Training
4. Assimilation: School Culture
5. Perception: Teacher Self-Efficacy
6. Vision: Glimpsing the Future

A closer examination into the phenomenon of second-career teachers was provided by grouping responses into these thematic categories. Of course, not every teacher fit neatly into every theme but, in accordance with the coding process, these themes were repeatedly identified in the responses and the writings of a majority of the participants.

### **Reflection: The Value of Prior Experiences**

Virtually all of the participants agreed that prior work experiences were not only valuable to them as teachers, but influenced the teaching process on a regular basis. Some of the participants entered the teaching profession from careers that held much in common with teaching. For example, Rhonda had served in the Peace Corps as an English teacher for African students. Sara had entered the profession after many years in Christian ministry, which often involved leading Bible study groups. Susan, a high school counselor, had previously worked in family and social services. On the other hand, an equal number of the participants entered the teaching profession from business, industry, and public service professions that offered little in the way of crossover skills to education. Nevertheless, even these participants felt that there was at least one valuable skill that their prior career had equipped them with that now benefits them in the classroom. Andrea pointed out that having prior work experiences allows her to focus upon her teaching without wondering what life might have been like if she had chosen another career.

**Stress.** Rick emphasized his prior experiences as having been far more stressful than teaching, which allows him to have an attitude of thankfulness that he feels many traditional teachers do not have. In responding to a question regarding how well adjusted he believes himself to be for the demands of teaching, he stated:

I think I'm ahead of the curve than people who just come out of school and are teaching because retail is a lot more demanding than this job with a lot more at stake. You don't have a union to protect you as a manager. You have expectations that you have to meet in business and if you don't get it you are out.

This assessment was shared by many of the participants who entered teaching from the corporate arena. The general agreement was that, in the business world, everyone is expendable. Conversely, all 12 participants

spoke of the teaching profession's lure of time off, good benefits, and the opportunity for personal development as pull factors and as elements that distinguish the teaching profession from other careers.

**Maturity.** Maturity was a recurring term when the topic of prior experience was discussed. All of the participants felt that entering the profession at an older age than their traditional counterparts had provided them with an opportunity to mature as working professionals. Janet pointed out that she thinks "you are going to learn the tricks of the trade anyway, but being older, you just know more how to act in the working world." Many of the participants offered similar reflections regarding how they were different from those who entered the profession immediately upon graduating from college. Thomas, the former police officer, added, "I can see myself if I was a teacher 10 years ago. I may have been too friendly instead of being firm and friendly." Anna stated that many of the skills that she learned in her previous setting would likely have been learned by the traditional teacher in time, but added that she entered the profession better equipped as a result of already having these experiences. She said that among these experiences are things such as,

Listening closely to details so you don't have to go back and redo whatever you're doing, reading your e-mail, all of the intangibles that you simply have to learn from working. Would you learn these anyway? Of course, but I feel that I have those skills with me on day one.

Hilary added that having to deal with difficult prisoners in her work in a state penitentiary prepared her for dealing with difficult students. Rhonda stated that organizational and time management skills are among the most important skills that she acquired in her previous work setting. Virtually all of the participants echoed this sentiment.

**Set apart.** When participants were asked what it is that sets them apart from their traditional track counterparts, the answers were widely varied. Andrea pointed out what she considered to be the unprofessional nature of many teachers which she found incredible. She said:

I was always surprised by the amount of teachers that did not even check their email. There are teachers that consistently have to be asked to complete necessary items. In the business world, these people would be fired! My ability to work with a sense of urgency, follow through, and anticipate sets me apart from my colleagues.

Rhonda added that she believes the burnout tendency is higher among traditional track teachers. Rick pointed out that he has something more to offer his students after a 33 year career in business. He stated that "I can tell kids to stay in school, get your education, and keep your nose to the grind stone or this is what you could expect,



because I've been there and I've done those sorts of things."

Sara and Anna spoke of their experiences raising their own children as being a tremendous advantage to them as new teachers. When asked what sets her apart from her colleagues who entered the profession upon graduating from college, Marjorie simply answered, "They can retire earlier."

### **Inspiration: Factors Motivating Change**

This diverse group of second-career teachers chose to leave their previous professions for a number of reasons. Among the reasons mentioned were the strain of the prior career on personal and family life, the unsatisfying nature of the work, a desire to do something meaningful, and a sense of calling in a religious or humanistic sense.

**Lifestyle.** One of the most appealing factors of teaching among this group of participants is the lifestyle that the profession offered. A few of these second-career teachers even sacrificed much better paying careers because they were lured by the potential of a career that is family friendly, with free weekends, holidays, and summers. Some commented on the strain that the previous line of work created, including personal life and family pressures. Rick stated:

I knew that my career had pretty much cost me my first marriage and I missed a lot of time with my children growing up. My second wife and I had a child and I did not want that to happen the second time around so I thought, 'I've got to make a change.'

Chad reflected that in his first career he became unsatisfied after five years, adding, "I probably over worked myself, and committed to a really difficult career path, and I considered leaving that just because it was more than I could handle." Janet commented on the monotony of her previous job and the dismal prospect of never having any significant time off: "When you work a regular 40 hour per week job, it is just week after week with no break." She went on to say that the opportunity to have time off was a major factor in choosing teaching as a second career. Thomas, who worked a demanding and constantly changing schedule as a police officer, decided to try substitute teaching first to see if he might prefer the schedule of a teacher. He elaborated that "somebody told me to substitute teach and see if you like that, you know, you'll be off during the summer. I thought, that would be nice."

**Satisfaction.** Rather than pull factors to teaching, some participants were influenced by push factors from their old job, most notably the unsatisfying nature of the work. Several of the participants commented that they felt that their work was meaningless and that they eventually came to desire a purpose in their work. Andrea felt that she was approaching the proverbial glass ceiling that many women encounter in the corporate workplace. In reflecting

upon that experience and her decision to become a teacher, she said:

They're very male oriented and, and I just realized that I couldn't really progress very high up in the company. Then I remembered fourth grade. I was a nerd and I guess I decided to stand up and give some presentation in front of the class and my teacher called my mom and said 'she's going to be a teacher one day.'

Chuck voiced a similar dissatisfaction with the financially volatile world of stock brokering. He added that in "February of '88 I made \$10,000 take home, March I made \$250. You just didn't know." He went on to state that he had always wanted to teach and coach baseball and he began to seek the advice of friends and family, as well as former teachers and coaches, who encouraged him to change professions.

**Making a difference.** The desire to do something meaningful has served as a strong motivator for all 12 of the participants in this study. Each of them repeatedly referred to teaching as a profession that has a tremendous impact on the lives of other people. In fact, Smith and Pantana (2009) found that the desire to "make a difference" rated higher than any other factor among a sample of 311 second-career teachers in a recent study of pre-service career changers. Eleven of the 12 participants in this study indicated that they are more satisfied with teaching than their previous career. Chuck characterized himself as much more satisfied with his teaching career "because it's more fulfilling and you are touching people in a positive light, no matter who it is." Janet noted a remarkable difference from her previous job:

Oh, definitely more satisfied. I've gone through a lot. I've had a major illness since I've been teaching and I have had a lot of support from students and from co-workers through all of that.

Rhonda, the lone college instructor, added that "when you're teaching you are doing something positive for other people and to me the most important thing is feeling like you're doing something useful."

**Calling.** In addition to other factors that make teaching appear to be an attractive second career, there is also among some of the participants a sense of calling, a religious or humanistic sense. Bigham and Smith (2008) asserted that in today's high-pressure climate of accountability, a "spiritual milieu" seems to be a necessary component in order to enter and succeed in the teaching profession. The term "calling" came up at several points in the initial interviews, prompting the researcher to ask the participants whether they considered teaching to be a calling in the follow-up interviews. All of the participants referred to teaching as a calling, although not all believed that teaching was their personal calling. Anna was emphatic in her belief that teaching is a calling. She said,

For me I definitely believe this was a calling from God, and I feel like I'm following His will for me.

This is something that I have given a lot of thought to. I believe that we all have a purpose that we were created for. That doesn't mean that it will be easy, though.

Rhonda added that teaching shares a sense of calling with other service professions, such as medicine and law enforcement. She adds, "I think it's one of the most influential jobs you can ever have, so to not look at it with some kind of ethical or humanistic or moral purpose...I think it's kind of missing the big picture." Former stockbroker Chuck pointed out that

I think it is a calling, but then again it's also a job. You know that you are going to work and doing all of that, but if you love what you do and you do it right, there's no greater calling.

This sense of calling provided a strong grounding for many of the participants, especially when the inevitable difficulties began to present themselves in the classroom. The feeling that one has been called by God coupled with the maturity gained through previous work experience was mentioned as a sustaining force through difficult situations.

#### **Preparation: Teacher Training**

**Quality of training.** An important component of teacher preparation is the quality of the training that a teacher receives, regardless of whether it is a formal graduate degree or a state alternative certification process. The perceived value of these experiences varied greatly among the participants of this study. For example, when asked whether teacher training actually prepared these teachers for the realities of the classroom, the response was mixed. Andrea, the former financial analyst, answered flatly, "I think that it prepared me as much as anything could have, because you have to find your own groove as a teacher." She went on to state that teaching is a process of discovery in finding what does and what does not work for each teacher. Chad pondered this question for some time, finally responding that "the problem with being a teacher is, until you are a teacher, you really don't know what it's like to be a teacher." Sara, with her background in ministry, did not feel that the teacher education process was very helpful in terms of realism. She advocated having more fieldwork and genuine classroom experiences. Many of the participants echoed this sentiment. Rick stated that, even though he had given countless business presentations, he was still "intimidated" by getting up in front of a classroom of high school students. Susan, the high school counselor, reflected that after working in social services that she was, "a lot more realistic than the curriculum was." She pointed out that her training presented her with ideal situations and that in schools, "we don't have many ideal situations." Chuck was critical in his assessment of his teacher education experience, stating:

It put so much emphasis on theory. Well, that's not what really goes on in the classroom. I think there needs to be more emphasis on classroom management and dealing with the political

structure of a school. I'd like to see it be more realistic.

**Student teaching.** Despite these frank evaluations of teacher training programs, all of the participants who completed a traditional student teaching experience spoke highly of this experience. Anna spoke of the value of planning and conducting lessons over simply discussing or observing these tasks. Marjorie discussed the challenges of student teaching for the older career changer with a family: "I was paying tuition, working for free, and paying child care so that was a little frustrating." She went on to state that her overall experience was good and that she believes that every experience in a classroom is ultimately valuable to the teacher-in-training.

**Prior experience.** When asked if their specific teacher training program did anything to emphasize or build upon their previous work experience, the answer was also varied. The majority of the participants believed that their program, even if it was tailored to career changers, did little to capitalize upon those experiences. Rick reflected that his program reinforced skills that he learned over three decades of management.

As far as tailoring content for second-career teachers, Sara commented that she believed "my professors differentiated. I think they did." Others questioned whether teacher education programs were even capable of adapting to meet the needs of second-career teacher candidates. Chad commented on the difficulty of addressing those needs in his experience:

I think it did a good job teaching me the content knowledge that I needed to know and teaching me some basic structure of lessons, but in terms of what it's like to be a teacher and what the lifestyle is going to be like and what the difficulties are, I don't think it did a very good job anticipating or explaining those facts.

Chuck and Hilary found their programs woefully lacking when considering prior work experiences, with Hilary commenting, "I feel like we were really trained more like robots." These comments led the researcher to ask how the participants believed that teacher education might be improved in order to emphasize the diverse backgrounds of potential second-career teachers. Anna came straight to the point when she addressed this question saying,

I think what could be helpful would require a lot more observations of teachers and hands-on experience, things that you could actually use. So much of it is theoretical and when you are actually there it's as if you are thrown to the wolves.

Chad shared Anna's assessment, saying that many career changers who decide to become teachers "don't really have a good idea of what they are getting themselves into." Almost all of the participants spoke of a need for teacher education programs to move away from the traditional focus upon methods and theory classes toward more practical field oriented course work.

**School districts.** In addition to the question concerning how teacher education programs might be improved, each participant was asked what school districts might do in order to take advantage of their experiences. The responses ranged from allowing these teachers to create a workshop for other teachers in which they could share skills and insights learned from other professions to allowing students more access to their particular areas of expertise.

Rick, the second-career teacher with over three decades of business experience, strongly advocated using people like himself to prepare students for the reality of the workplace. Many of the participants stated that school districts have an untapped resource in its second-career teachers. Andrea, the former financial analyst asked:

What if schools established workshops for parents and maybe students outside of the school day using these teachers' prior work experiences? For example, I was a finance major. I could have easily, along with a counselor, led a class for the parents of seniors with discussions on college budgeting and spending.

Most of the participants felt that school districts make very little effort to identify and utilize prior work experience among their teachers. All of them felt that they and others like them have much to offer to both colleagues and students in the way of prior experiences. In fact, among these 12 second-career teachers alone, there is well over 100 years of collective work experience outside of the field of education.

#### **Assimilation: School Culture**

The second-career teachers in this study indicated a difference in the culture of schools versus their previous working environment. The researcher was interested to know specifically what difficulties were encountered in the process of assimilating or adjusting to school culture. The responses varied because, just as the culture of schools is different from those in business or government settings, the participants suggested that each of their schools have certain unique cultural aspects also. For example, a rural high school is likely quite different from an urban elementary setting. Nevertheless, the researcher was especially interested in the process of adapting to the role of teacher after entering from another field and the challenges that the school climate presented to these individuals.

**Early experiences.** Andrea felt that the most difficult phase was the first "few months of working where you are not only learning the school culture but how your individuality fits inside the culture." Hilary observed that "there is no follow through and that's hard, and just for me personally, dealing with the teachers is a lot harder than dealing with the students." She pointed out the politics and favoritism that exist among administrators in some work settings and how students often feel the same way about teachers. After 10 years in industry, Janet was surprised by the unpredictable nature of teaching. She said, "when you

come from a quiet, organized environment to where anything can happen at any time, you've got to be able to move quick." She also discussed the importance of the new teacher staying away from the teachers' lounge and the negativity that exists among many teachers, pointing out the need to, "stay away from that, don't get into the gossip. Don't get into that kind of thing which will only get you in trouble." Chad immediately recognized the bureaucratic nature of working in public schools. He said:

I think schools are very insular. I think that people do things often because they've always been done, and there's always kind of a never ending little game of red tape that has to be played, and I think that's really hard to make an adjustment to when you first come into the profession.

**Adjusting.** All 12 of the participants in this study seemed to be well assimilated into the schools in which they teach. In classroom observations conducted by the researcher, each of these teachers appeared to be relaxed and comfortable in their interactions with students, other teachers, and administrators. The common sentiment among the teachers in this group who had worked at multiple schools was that school culture varies greatly from school to school. Andrea made this point clearly, stating:

I have now worked for three different schools, and each school has been very different. I have learned from being displeased with the corporate culture in which I worked that it was very important for me to find the school culture that meshed with my values and ideas in education.

Rhonda vocalized the frustration that many new teachers face, regardless of whether they are new college graduates or career changers. Her frustration with being "thrown into the classroom" without a transition period was a common complaint among the participants. A lack of adequate mentoring programs added to this sense of frustration.

#### **Perception: Teacher Self-Efficacy**

**Knowing students.** Participants were asked to reflect upon how skills acquired during the previous career were beneficial to them in their current teaching assignment using specific examples where appropriate. Often, these responses were introspective and gave additional insight into the phenomenon of second-career teachers. For example, Chad lamented that "we rarely get to know our kids really as people. This makes it difficult sometimes to relate to them." Hilary reflected on a similar theme as Chad. Her concern for her students, as well as her frustrations, emerges clearly in the following statement:

For every class I teach, I estimate having 3-5 students at risk for behaviors such as dropping out, committing crimes, relying on welfare, etc. With these kids, it always feels like I am in a boxing ring leaving *me* feeling exhausted and beaten up. And with my weak little jabs, I have to keep plugging that self worth back into them.

A desire to know and connect with students was obvious among all twelve participants in the study. Each teacher felt that establishing strong, positive, and appropriate relationships with students was a necessary ingredient toward achieving success as a teacher.

**Interest in students.** A selfless interest in the well being of their students was a common theme in most of the journal entries of the 12 participants in this study. Anna demonstrated a motherly love for her students. She wrote:

I believe my skills as a mother of three children have given me a different view, one through the child's eyes and heart. My mothering has helped me teach each student individually to guide them as a unique person with different abilities.

**Acquired skills.** Chuck reflected on how his previous career helped him to develop the people skills that he now uses in teaching and coaching. In fact, many of these teachers returned to the skills that they obtained in their previous career and how those skills are transposed upon their teaching practice. Rick emphasized the value of his real world experiences in preparing his students for life. He wrote:

I believe that my experiences in all the different jobs that I have had outside of being a schoolteacher may help some of these kids. Some of them open their eyes because I have done some things. Most teachers do not have those experiences.

**Role models.** Many of the participants reflected on their role as a positive adult role model for their students. In addition to providing this example, a recurrent theme in the comments of these teachers was the value of their prior experiences. Thomas spoke of using his repertoire of police skills on an almost daily basis.

It should be noted that the overwhelming majority of these teachers were focused upon their students rather than upon their environment, careers, or personal interests. A clear need to make an impact upon the lives of the students that they are teaching, as well as the desire to impart the lessons learned during their previous careers is evident in these journals.

#### **Vision: Glimpsing the Future**

**Outlook.** Second-career teachers enter the profession at a later age than their traditional track peers, often one or two decades later. As a result, their outlook for the future takes on a different perspective. For example, these teachers will reach retirement at a much older age, meaning that they are still in the classroom at an age well beyond their colleagues. By contrast, having changed careers before, some of these teachers are not opposed to the notion that they may do so again at some point in the future. The researcher was interested in the general impressions of these teachers concerning the current state and future of education as a profession as well as having them discuss personal professional goals. Finally, all of

the participants were willing to offer advice for teachers entering the profession from other fields.

**The state of education.** The participants in this study were asked to comment on what they perceive to be the current state of education in the state of Georgia, as well as in the nation in general. Most teachers were quick to report concerns over national and state educational policies and increasing demands being placed upon teachers in areas beyond the scope of the classroom. Andrea commented on the sluggish manner in which the profession has sought to address the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century learner, saying:

This generation is very different and needs more to be able to become productive, valuable citizens of this century. I think the future for teachers holds some tumultuous times especially if they are unwilling to learn, change, and be flexible.

Anna voiced the concerns of most of the participants by addressing the current national obsession with accountability. "I see that even getting more abundant in the future with more red tape, more regulation," she said. Hilary had a similar forecast predicting, "less time for the kids and less money because all the money will be for the paperwork and putting the data on the computer instead of working with the kids." Marjorie, disturbed by the question, finally responded,

I look at the budget cuts and we all know that the money is wasted, not just in education but throughout the state, and then no wonder we're where we are. It's easy to see but I try not to dwell on that because if I did I'd be ready to quit.

**Legislation.** The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 was a subject that invoked a great deal of vitriol from these second-career teachers. Although some spoke of a need for standards and accountability, all of the teachers who mentioned NCLB did so in a negative context, questioning its effectiveness and mentioning a need to allow teachers to focus upon the classroom.

Rick stated that "there are kids that are going to be left behind no matter what, and I look at education as so many politicians who've never taught, meddling in something that they don't fully understand and don't comprehend." The notion that the entire process has become seriously flawed was mentioned by Chad. He reflected that "it's a constant sort of bureaucratic game of paperwork and these types of things and that really bogs down the actual education process."

**The future of education.** Other participants voiced different concerns over the current and future state of education. Thomas believes that the degeneration of the American family is chief among his concern and that he is hopeful that society will move back to a point where parents discipline their children and teachers can focus upon teaching. Other participants spoke of student misbehavior and a lack of parental support. These factors, along with the increasing pressures of accountability during

a major economic downturn may discourage future college graduates, according to some of the participants.

Susan, reflecting on the current economy, made the point that “most colleges have made the education program one of the easier ones to complete, and I think in the future we’re going to have lots of people with degrees that don’t have jobs.” Rick also theorized that economic pressures may cause some to reconsider teaching despite the lure of what is often perceived as a steady profession.

**Encouragement and advice.** Despite these gloomy assessments of the future of education, most of the participants were willing to encourage others, including their own children, to become teachers, with a couple of notable exceptions. However, most were emphatic that any potential teacher, especially any considering a career change, should be certain that he or she really wants to be a teacher. Andrea pointed out that “you just have to constantly tell yourself that you’re in it for the kids and, if you keep them as your primary focus, then I think everything else falls into place.” Chad was pragmatic as he offered two points of advice to those considering changing professions to become a teacher. He said:

I would suggest they do two things: The first is that they need to really spend some time with a group of teachers and look at the lifestyle and the wage because I think the trap with education is that they pay you decently at the beginning but then it never really increases. The other thing that I would recommend is that they spend as much time in a classroom working with kids as possible.

Chuck warned that those considering this change should be certain that teaching is what they strongly desire to do because of the long term damage that a poor teacher might have upon the children in his or her classroom. Hilary made a similar observation, stating that it is “bad for your students to know that you’re dissatisfied with your job.” Sara continued to state the need for those considering teaching to be certain that it is what they want to do, observing that

I don’t know why some people go into teaching to be perfectly honest. I don’t know what they’re looking for. I don’t know what they’re expecting it to be, because if you don’t have a genuine compassion for kids, then you don’t need to be here.

The answers were mixed when the participants were asked if they would encourage their own children to become teachers. Chuck quickly responded, “I would because of the good things. I still think that the good things out weigh the bad things.” College instructor Rhonda also gave teaching a positive endorsement saying, “absolutely, I mean even though there are all these pitfalls, that’s any profession really, I think it’s a wonderful job.” Rick agreed and made the point that one of his children had already decided to become a teacher. Anna returned to the idea of individuals receiving a spiritual calling into teaching.

When addressing the issue of encouraging her own children, she answered:

Definitely, if they felt called. It is not something to be entered into lightly. It is a much harder job than most people think. It takes a certain type of person. It’s not for everybody, but if it was something that they felt they were being led to do, then I would support their decision.

Andrea echoed Anna’s statement, saying that “If my children were called to teach, yes I would love for them to be in education.”

Among the other group of teachers, those who were reluctant to respond that they would encourage their children to become teachers, there was a degree of caution. For example, Chad seemed to have conflicting emotions as he wrestled with issues of status and earning potential versus a strong desire to be a teacher. He reluctantly stated that he would,

Probably discourage them. There are too many other professions that they could do more for their family with. I’m not saying that I would absolutely forbid them from doing it but I would discourage them highly and if they were convinced that they were really called to do it, I wouldn’t stand in their way.

Hilary also pointed out that, although she would not encourage her children to be teachers, she would not try to stop them from doing it either.

These comments revealed an apparent duplicity among most of the participants in this study. Although many wanted to recommend the teaching profession, they felt that they could not do so without a clear warning to potential teachers to be certain that they truly desire to be teachers.

## **Discussion**

### **Motivating Events**

The participants in this study mentioned several factors that served as an impetus for changing careers. Among these were the desire to have a career that makes a difference in the lives of other people, the need to do more meaningful and fulfilling work, the need to leave a legacy for future generations, the desire to have a more flexible and family friendly schedule, the love of a particular subject matter, and the desire to share life experiences with younger people. Many of the participants mentioned being encouraged to change careers, particularly in order to become teachers, by family, friends, former teachers, and coaches. Many also mentioned feeling a “calling,” in the spiritual sense, to enter teaching. These motivations match closely the recent study by Smith and Pantana (2009) which found that:

23% of respondents offered the top reason as their love for children and desire to make a difference in their lives. The second most commonly provided answer related to their ability to teach and their enjoyment of it. Interestingly, the third most

common response, given by 12% of the participants, identified dissatisfaction with their previous career as their main reason for switching to teaching (p. 7).

Regardless of reason, the participants in this study all had come to a career crossroads and, in some cases, a purpose of life crisis that ultimately led them to the classroom. In the process of changing their careers, many of the experiences that they had were later found to be common across the sample.

### **Common Experiences**

Although the participants in this study came from a variety of backgrounds, they did share some common experiences in the decision to become teachers, the teacher preparation process, and in the transition to the classroom. Many of the participants mentioned considering and then rejecting teaching as a college major as an undergraduate. Others spoke of having no initial interest in teaching whatsoever. Almost all had come to a point of dissatisfaction with the previous career. Some mentioned a sense of reaching a plateau with no real hope of advancing within the organization. Others mentioned realizing that they had chosen the wrong career upon graduating from college or the feeling that they were being led toward a career in teaching by way of a spiritual revelation, or calling.

Most of the participants spoke of the hardships encountered upon making the decision to leave an already established, and for some a well paying, career to go back to school in order to become a teacher. This sentiment was especially true among those who had family responsibilities at the time. Financial hardship, strained personal relationships, and a sense of uncertainty were common themes during these discussions. Some spoke of frustrations with the teacher training process including what were often deemed as excessive requirements by the state for those seeking alternative certification. Certainly, there are ways to streamline the process in order to encourage those who are seeking to change careers. Nevertheless, it is clear that any major upheaval in one's life will have a ripple effect upon finances and relationships. These teachers understood that changing careers would be difficult, but were willing to endure many hardships in order to achieve a better way of life and a career more aligned with their personal goals and values. These desires are consistent with what Maslow (1943) identified as a need for self-actualization, as well as what Levinson (1978) referenced as a desire by many mid-life career changers to find a profession more in-line with one's system of beliefs and values.

### **Teacher Education**

There were three methods by which these career changers obtained a state teacher's license: traditional degree programs, graduate programs for those with undergraduate degrees outside of the field of education, and state sponsored alternative certification routes.

Overwhelmingly, the participants in this study believed that these programs did not adequately prepare them for the realities of the classroom, nor were they able to help them utilize their previous work experiences. Nevertheless, they all felt that student teaching was the most valuable preparation experience of their respective programs. The majority of the participants spoke of a need for more field experiences in teacher training programs, especially for second-career teacher candidates, for many of whom it has been decades since they were grade school students themselves.

Teacher education programs need to be revamped in order to meet the needs of career changers and those entering the profession at a later age. Already, there has been some relief for potential career changers with the advent of a number of high quality online teacher preparation programs, which seems to support the findings of Smith and Pantana (2009) in their recent study of second-career teachers. They reported that, in a sample of 311 teachers, "nearly half (48%) stated that they would not have switched careers if such an online option were not available" (p. 8). In an age of readily available technology, these blended online/residential programs may offer a viable alternative to potential career changers who wish to remain employed or simply cannot afford to return to school full time in a traditional program.

### **Benefits of a Previous Career**

Not surprisingly, all of the participants in this study highlighted the value of having prior career experiences before becoming teachers. Some of these teachers made the point that, although the previous career may have had no crossover value in terms of skills, it nevertheless provided an opportunity to mature and experience a world outside of education that few teachers who enter the profession immediately after college ever see. On the other hand, approximately half of the participants could point to specific skills that are of particular use to them now as teachers. All of these teachers stated that they have something unique to offer to students, that being a glimpse of the "real world." Interestingly, most felt that school districts do very little, if anything, to capitalize on the wealth of previous work experiences that exists among members of the teaching community. Suggestions by these teachers included staff development sessions where these teachers may be utilized as outside "experts" and as advisors or mentors to work-bound high school students.

Finally, reactions were mixed when the participants were asked if they might change careers again at some point in the future. Many teachers simply responded that they enjoy teaching and intend to continue until retirement, while others emphasized the desire to do something different at some point in the future. Because the phenomenon of second-career teachers is relatively new, there is little research that directly indicates whether these teachers will remain in the profession. For those who become successful teachers,

there is every reason for school districts to make the effort to retain these teachers. Their firsthand experiences in fields such as business, industry, law enforcement, and the military are valuable resources that simply cannot be replicated in the classroom.

### **Satisfaction with the New Career**

The decision to leave one career for another can be life changing in many respects. For example, it will likely involve an extended period of financial hardship, along with the inevitable strain upon personal relationships and the ability to pursue hobbies or other interests. In many cases, teaching also results in a reduction in earnings. In order for these difficulties to be worthwhile, it is necessary for potential second-career teachers to believe that they will find some degree of satisfaction in their new profession. This study sought to discover the extent to which second-career teachers have found satisfaction in their new jobs.

The overwhelming majority of the participants in this study reported being satisfied with their new choice of profession. Many discussed the advantage of having time to spend with family and friends, as well as to pursue interests outside of work, as a clear advantage over their previous careers even though this meant giving up higher paying positions. This particular instance seems to illustrate Alderfer's (1972) regression theory in which the individual, unable to find satisfaction in the upper levels of Maslow's hierarchy, reestablishes himself at a lower, more basic level. In addition, many participants also spoke of being fulfilled by working with children, which was the primary motivator for most of the participants to change careers in the first place.

Conversely, there were some distinct areas of dissatisfaction. Namely, the bureaucratic nature of schools, the overwhelming demands placed on teachers to do much more than just teach, and the apathy of many students and parents. A small minority of the participants in this study indicated that these concerns may eventually lead to yet another career change at some point in the near future. These findings are consistent with Herzberg's (2008) observations concerning a need to satisfy basic dissatisfying, or hygiene factors in the workplace. For the most part, these teachers envision themselves remaining in the teaching profession until retirement. Most confessed that the youthful idealism that many new teachers have along with a tendency among many new teachers to burn out and leave the profession early does not apply to second-career teachers. They have already passed through this phase while working in a previous profession. Most of these teachers agreed that teaching is a good and honorable profession and stated that they would encourage those considering changing careers to enter the field, including their own children.

### **Conclusion**

The participants in this study entered the teaching profession from a variety of previous careers. They had different motivations for becoming teachers, but shared a

desire to have a meaningful impact on the lives of young people. All of the participants in this study faced hardships as they began the process of preparing to become teachers, including strains on finances and upon family responsibilities.

The routes taken by this group of second-career teachers to equip themselves with the necessary academic degrees and state certifications varied somewhat. Some chose graduate programs while others took advantage of Georgia's alternative certification process. Regardless of how they were prepared, these teachers eventually found themselves in front of classrooms while adjusting to the culture of schools. Many found these new work settings to be very different from their previous work environments. Despite the challenges that face those seeking to enter the profession from a previous career, the overwhelming majority of the participants in this study would encourage others become teachers.

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*Changing Course: Reflections of Second-Career Teachers*

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