Redesigning Teacher Education Programs to Meet the Needs of Today's Second Career Pre-Service Teachers

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Research suggests the fastest growing group in teacher training programs is second career teachers (Brooks & Hill, 2004). This chapter examines the profiles of second-career pre-service teachers in a blended online program in Silicon Valley, California. Participants' motivations and reasons for becoming an educator were examined from a sociocultural lens to understand how economic, social, and cultural factors might influence their decision to enter the teaching profession. In addition, formative, social, and personal experiences provide insight as to why this group selected a non-traditional teacher education program, and what prior skills and experiences they bring to the teaching profession.

INTRODUCTION

Second-career teachers are commonly identified as individuals with bachelor's degrees in non-education related fields and with years of work experience in other occupations (Haselkorn & Hammerness, 2008). These educators come from a variety of professions and their motivation to become a teacher may include reasons such as a desire to make a difference and dissatisfaction with their previous career. Knowing why these professionals leave their previous careers to become a teacher can be beneficial to teacher education programs. Teacher education programs may have as little as ten months to prepare pre-service teachers for a complex profession that requires mastery of content and pedagogical knowledge, classroom management, assessment and differentiation to name just a few skills. Identifying the skills second career pre-service teachers (SCPT) have acquired and the factors that influenced them to leave their professions will be useful to prepare this growing group of future educators and retain them in this challenging profession.

The present study took place in Silicon Valley; home to the world's largest technology corporations and thousands of start-up companies. It is the leading area for technological development in the United States and one-third of all venture capital investment. Participants in this study were enrolled in a non-traditional school that is the second largest non-profit private school in California and for the past thirteen years, the leading institution for preparing credentialed teachers in the state. The average age of students at the university was thirty-five with the majority of students in their second or third careers. The purpose of the present study was to explore the skills, experiences, motivations and perceptions of SCPTs in a blended online program.

BACKGROUND

In order to provide a comprehensive examination of the profiles of second-career pre-service teachers, two theoretical frameworks were examined. The first framework concerned teacher identity. According to Taylor (1989) identity can be defined as "the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose" (p. 27). From this perspective identity is shaped by one's previous experiences and beliefs, which influences one's decisions and choices in the future. SCPTs previous career is part of their identity and contributes to the way they view knowledge, pedagogy, student-teacher relationships, and the choices they make with regards to curriculum and instruction. When new information is delivered it would be valuable to make a connection to past

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