

A Glimpse into the Life of One Second-Career Novice Teacher Using the Lens of Instructional Planning

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Recently there has been a significant increase in the number of second-career teacher education majors, but little is known of how their prior career experiences would affect their planning decisions. One second-career male novice teacher was followed from student teaching into his first year of teaching. Through the use of think-aloud recordings of planning, interviews, stimulated recall methods, analysis of written plans, and field notes of classroom observations, data were gathered to obtain a detailed description of planning practices. Recommendations for teacher educators are made.

In recent years many teacher educators have noted a significant increase in the number of second-career teacher education majors, many of whom are adults who have engaged in a profession for several years prior to entering a teacher education program. Yet, little is known about how their experience in other careers may affect their planning decisions and how they assume the role of teacher.

Extending Lortie's (1975) claim about how critical pre-existing beliefs are to novice teacher practice, recent studies suggest that preexisting beliefs about teaching and learning, especially for second-career teachers, are influenced as much by prior professional work and personal life experiences as prior schooling experiences and teacher preparation programs (Powell & Riner, 1992). Moreover, these beliefs influence what preservice teachers learn about teaching during preservice teacher education (Cole, 1990) and how they initially plan and teach lessons in school classrooms (Powell & Riner, 1992).

One of the premises of this study is that planning practice offers a powerful lens for focusing on how the practice of second career teachers may develop in unique ways. Such an investigation can also provide insight into how second-career teachers develop in the role as teacher and the factors that affect this development.

Method

Descriptions were made of one male novice teacher who was followed from his student teaching experience into the first year of teaching. Both during student teaching and the first year of teaching data were collected using

think-aloud tape recordings of planning, questionnaires, interviews, stimulated recall methods, an analysis of written plans, and field notes made of classroom observations. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. A questionnaire was completed prior to student teaching which requested biographical information. From these data, a detailed description of this novice's unique planning practices was then generated; the participant read the description and corrected any inaccurate information.

Description of Participant

The novice teacher was a 38-year-old former business supervisor who had earned a degree in business administration. At 36, Jeff decided to resign his management position at an aircraft manufacturing company and complete the courses required for dual certification as a secondary social studies and English teacher. Jeff was enrolled in a traditional undergraduate teacher education program at a small, midwestern liberal arts college. He was married, had three children, and had worked in business for over 10 years. Yet, he desired to become a teacher. His philosophy of teaching was expressed in the following quote: "I believe, like Martin Luther, that next to the ministry teaching is the highest vocation. One good teacher can make a tremendous difference." Jeff student taught in a large urban high school and obtained his first full-time teaching position in social studies at a suburban high school. He was selected as the outstanding student teacher at his university and was also nominated by his principal for the Sally May first year teacher award.

Limitations of Study

One caveat that should be noted is the limited

generalizability of these findings, i.e., these findings may hold true only for middle-aged males who have worked in business. They may not hold true for second-career females and/or for those who enter teaching from other professions.

Results

First, the key factor affecting planning during student teaching and the first year will be described. Second, the manner in which Jeff assumed the role of teacher will be described.

Factors Affecting Planning

One of the most critical factors to affect Jeff's plans was his first career in business. This influence is best portrayed in a number of analogies that Jeff drew between teaching and business. First, Jeff said that he believed that education was also a business, the primary product of which was student learning. However, he objected to what he perceived as a 1950's conflict management model being used by the administration of the district in which he student taught. Jeff commented:

The district is emphasizing outputs but is ignoring the inputs... depending upon the quality of the input you get a different output. In business faulty products are not passed on to the next level. But ninth graders who can't write a sentence are passed on to the high school. Therefore, the question should be was there an improvement, without referring to a set standard.

Jeff also firmly believed that schools needed to adapt methods used by the business world to evaluate their employees' performance. For instance, he believed in rewarding teachers with merit pay incentives provided that the incoming level of students was taken into account when considering their standardized test performance.

A second analogy Jeff made to his business background and teaching was as follows: "In education, as in supervision, you sort of hire and fire students." Jeff referred here to giving students passing grades and "hiring" them or failing them and "firing" them. In this process he saw his primary role as akin to his role as a supervisor, which was to impart knowledge to others whom he supervised so that they knew more than he and could take his place.

A third way in which his business experience affected Jeff's beliefs about teaching and subsequently his plans was related in the following quote:

I think you can go overboard with individualized instruction. Our schools do poor jobs of preparing students for reality; and the reality in business today is that you must know how to work in groups. Your boss won't work with you individually, you'll have to figure out a solution yourself or in a team.

Jeff also said he preferred using cooperative learning in

student teaching whenever possible because in business he found it impossible to supervise 28 to 30 people at once; as in business, he believed, teachers need to appoint "lead persons," i.e., assign various lead roles to members of cooperative learning groups.

Assuming Role as Teacher

Jeff, unlike many younger student teachers, made lesson plans several weeks in advance and actively took over classes during the second week of student teaching. His experiences in business seemed to aid him in negotiating to take over more responsibility early in the semester than previous student teachers had taken. That Jeff seemed to feel very confident about teaching is clear in the next interview quote:

I've spent a number of years soul-searching about becoming a teacher. Finally, I just had to decide to bite the bullet...leave my good paying job, use my savings to go back to school...and go for it. At my age, it was now or never.

Compared to many student teachers, Jeff made instructional plans without concern for establishing his own personal and professional identity. Instead, his lesson plans were focused on helping both his students and the larger community. For example, he integrated into his American history class a project for feeding the homeless. It is of interest to note that in Eriksonian terms Jeff appeared to be in the generativity versus stagnation stage of development, which may help to explain some of the behaviors he exhibited, atypical of most student teachers.

During his first year of full-time teaching, Jeff also wrote a proposal in which he outlined a program that would help socialize first-year teachers into the profession at his school. These efforts were possible because he was confident in his role as teacher. Jeff's extensive subject-matter knowledge also afforded him additional free time to pursue these matters. The negotiation skills he learned from business also seemed to empower him to propose changes in a convincing, yet tactful manner.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Although generalizations cannot be drawn from a study of one teacher, there are some recommendations that deserve consideration if these findings are replicated. One of the implications of such research is that teacher educators need to address explicitly the variations in ideas, beliefs, and experience that second-career novices bring to teaching from other careers. A second implication is that teacher educators should be more aware of how the unique psychosocial characteristics of second-career teachers influence the way in which they implement the major aspects of planning.

References

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