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Feelings of Preparedness in First Career Versus Second Career Teachers

John Deemy

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John D. Deemy

Department of Education, University of Mary Washington

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Dr. Nancy Guth

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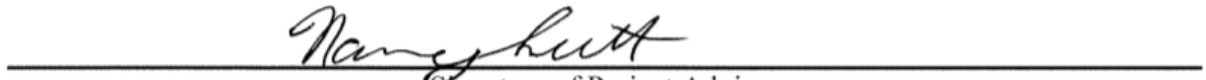

Signature of Project Advisor

Dr. Nancy Guth

Adjunct Professor of Education

Abstract

Second career teachers are a rapidly growing demographic within the teacher population. However, little research on second career teachers exists. Most of the available literature on second career teachers deals with their motivations for switching careers and the strengths they bring to the classroom. There is a particularly stark lack of research concerning the preparedness of second career teachers during their first year in the classroom. The goal of this research was to investigate preparedness of second career teachers relative to traditional career path teachers. Active teachers with Master's degrees in education were surveyed to measure feelings of preparedness to teach post-graduation relative to career path. A specific aim of this study was to identify differences in second career and traditional career path teacher preparedness that can be addressed in teacher education programs.

Table of Contents

Introduction *3*
Rationale **3**
Explanatory Definitions **4**
Literature Review *5*
Characteristics of Second Career Teachers **5**
Values of Second Career Teachers **7**
Challenges **8**
Possible Solutions **10**
Conclusion **13**
Methodology *14*
Participants and Setting **14**
Data Collection **15**
Data Analysis **16**
Limitations **17**
Findings *17*
Classroom Management **17**
Lesson Planning **18**
Differentiation **19**
Parent-teacher Interaction **19**
Workplace Community **19**
Work-life Balance **20**
Discussion *20*
Classroom Management **20**
Lesson Planning **21**
Differentiation **22**
Parent-Teacher Interaction **22**
Workplace Community **23**
Work-Life Balance **24**
Limitations **24**
Conclusion *25*
References *28*
Appendix A *32*

Introduction

The goal of this research was to determine if there are differences in feelings of preparedness between first career and second career teachers during their first year of teaching. The American education system faces a shortage of qualified teachers (Gray & Taie, 2015) that may worsen as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (Page, 2020). Multiple methods of addressing this shortage have been proposed, including efforts to reduce teacher attrition (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2019) and to recruit from professionals already working in other fields (Sindelar, Dewey, Rosenberg, Corbett, Denslow, & Lotfinia, 2012). This research aims to serve these goals by measuring preparedness of second career teachers which could inform efforts to recruit and retain professionals from other fields. A better understanding for which challenges second career teachers are well prepared could increase recruitment. Understanding the challenges for which second career teachers are not well prepared could increase the retention of these professions in the teacher workforce.

Rationale

From 2009 to 2014, enrollment in teacher preparation programs in the United States declined by 35%, There was a further 23% decline in candidates completing teacher preparation programs (Sutcher et al., 2019). Recruitment efforts aimed at increasing the pool of teacher education candidates include providing alternate routes to certification for professionals currently working in other fields (Sindelar et al., 2012). While targeting candidates already working in other fields does reach people who otherwise would not have considered teaching (Donitsa-Schmidt & Weinberger, 2014), they are still subject to similar attrition rates as first career teachers (Gray & Taie, 2015).

Reducing attrition rates would not only be fundamental in resolving the teacher shortage, but would free up resources for schools to devote to their students (Sutcher et al., 2019), because replacing teachers who leave the profession costs school districts between $4,000 to $18,000 per teacher (Sutcher et al., 2019). Many factors affect teacher attrition rates, including salary, work environment, administrative support, and accountability pressure (Sutcher et al., 2019). Additional research suggests teacher attrition is also affected by teachers' perceptions of stress related to demands of their profession (Troesch & Bauer 2020).

Adequate preparation and mentoring can reduce these stressors, thus reducing attrition rates (Van Overschelde, Saunders, & Ash, 2017). Teacher preparation and mentoring requires an understanding of teacher candidates as learners (Baeten & Meeus, 2016; Etherington, 2011). Second career teachers have been shown to approach learning differently than their first career counter parts. Which may mean that they face different challenges during their teacher training and in their first year as a teacher than their first career teacher counterparts (Bunn & Wake, 2015).

Explanatory Definitions

For the sake of this study, a first career teacher will be defined as someone with less than six months of full-time employment experience in a field other than education, not including temporary summer employment (Serow & Forrest, 1994). A second career teacher will be defined as someone with at least six months of full-time employment experience in a field other than education, not including temporary summer employment (Serow & Forrest, 1994).

Literature Review

Second career teachers have not been well studied and the majority of existing research focuses on the motivations of selecting teaching as a second career (Baeten & Meeus, 2016). These motivations generally fall into two categories : extrinsic and intrinsic (Bunn & Wake, 2015). Extrinsic motivating factors typically include practical, tangible considerations like salary, schedule, and job security (Bunn & Wake, 2015). These factors are generally outweighed by intrinsic motivators such as a desire to serve their communities, improve the lives of children (Bunn & Wake, 2015; Bar-Tal & Gilat, 2019), and a desire to contribute to or improve the field of education (Donitsa-Schmidt & Weinberger 2014). Further, intrinsic motivations often arise in second career teacher candidates who entered their training largely for extrinsic reasons (Bunn & Wake, 2015). These motivations may be responsible for the majority of second career teachers who report satisfaction in their new career and who would encourage others to become teachers despite the challenges involved (Lee, 2011).

Characteristics of Second Career Teachers

Second career teachers are heterogeneous, and no description of their strengths will apply to all of them. However, available data suggest second career teachers are likely to possess characteristics advantageous to their roles as returning students and as teachers (Baeten & Meeus, 2016). These characteristics include communication skills, resilience, self-efficacy, and an ability to help their students apply theory to practice.

Second career teachers have also been touted in the past as more diverse in gender and race than their first career counterparts. However, the data on second career teachers' diversity is inconclusive (Baeten & Meeus, 2016) and seems to depend largely on location (Sindelar et al., 2012). Generally, second career teachers are older than their first career counterparts when they enter the classroom, and this carries some advantages, including self-efficacy, networking skills,

and a proclivity for connecting theory to its application in their classrooms and making space for their students to exercise autonomy in constructing some of their own learning (Baeten & Meeus, 2016; Bar-Tal & Gilat, 2019).

Second career teachers tend to be more mature and report higher levels of self-efficacy (Bunn & Wake, 2015; Troesch & Bauer, 2020; Bar-Tal & Gilat, 2019). This self-efficacy has been shown to be a key factor in reducing perceived stress from work-related tasks (Troesch & Bauer, 2020), which is a major contributor to teacher burnout and attrition (Torres, 2016; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009; Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006). Second career teachers demonstrate the ability to handle multiple tasks simultaneously and exhibit patience and resilience when facing obstacles (Grier & Johnston, 2009). This self-efficacy plays a crucial role in combating emotional exhaustion and burnout in teachers, and has been shown to remain important no matter how long a teacher has been involved in the profession (Keller-Schneider, 2018). Elevated self-efficacy in second career teachers leads them draw on available resources more effectively and frequently when faced with challenges (Bunn & Wake, 2015).

Some of these resources include their colleagues, mentors, and administrators. Often, second career teachers have experience collaborating with others in the workplace, and more readily request assistance when needed (Baeten & Meeus, 2016; Troesch & Bauer, 2020; Bar-Tal & Gilat, 2019). Second career teachers also tend to develop professional networks more efficiently than their first career counterparts (Bunn & Wake, 2015; Troesch & Bauer, 20209), This may mitigate some of the isolation inherent in teaching, where children comprise the bulk of human interaction (Lee, 2011; Haggard et al., 2006). Additionally, second career teachers tend to develop networks among their student peers during participation in teacher preparation programs because they are likely to establish meaningful connections with classmates given the

opportunity (Chambers, 2002; Brouwer, 2007; Lee, 2011). The ability to find or create social support in this way is a valuable asset for teachers, as it has been found to be a major determining factor in the likelihood and effect of emotional exhaustion and burnout in teachers, regardless of how long they have been teaching (Keller-Schneider, 2018).

Some second career teachers report that these social strengths extend to their students as well, and they see reduced levels of student-teacher conflict compared to their first career counterparts (Chambers, 2002). Some of this reduced conflict with students may also be attributed to the higher percentage of second career teachers who already have children of their own upon entering the profession (Baeten & Meeus, 2016; Lee, 2011). Whether they have children or not, they are usually at later life stages and have undergone the process of learning a new career at least once before (Troesch & Bauer, 2020). Classroom environment has been found to be another major determiner of rates of emotional exhaustion and burnout among teachers (Keller-Schneider, 2018).

Values of Second Career Teachers

Second career teachers value application based learning (Chambers, 2002; Haggard et al., 2006) and thrive when they are able to directly connect theory to practice (Brouwer, 2007; Lee, 2011). They bring this approach to their own classrooms as well, and integrate links to the outside world in their lessons (Chambers, 2002). There is some evidence to suggest that they are more likely than their first career counterparts to engage with new, experimental teaching methods, especially those with social and practical components (Chambers, 2002), although the research is not univocal on this issue (Baeten & Meeus, 2016).

Despite some criticism of alternate fast-track teacher education programs (Haim & Amdur, 2016), the students of second career teachers graduating from those programs perform no differently on standardized testing than students of teachers graduating from traditional five-

year teacher education programs (Kane, Rockoff, & Staiger, 2008). In addition to apparently meeting the needs of their students, second career teachers report increased happiness derived from having their own psychological needs met by their new profession, although many struggle to cope with the duality of job satisfaction and increased stress (Bar-Tal & Gilat, 2019). This aligns with Lee's findings that despite their wide variety in backgrounds, second career teachers almost all felt dissatisfied in their previous careers (2011).

Challenges

Despite unique and valuable skills as well as experience, second career teachers report feeling as challenged (Haggard et al., 2006; Baeten & Meeus, 2016) or nearly as challenged (Troesch & Bauer, 2020) by their early teaching years as their first career counterparts. While the literature is not decisive, second career teachers appear to have comparable or greater rates of attrition than first career teachers (Gray & Taie, 2015).

Many factors that contribute to early career teacher attrition have been identified, including the mental and physical symptoms associated with emotional exhaustion and burnout common in careers that involve a high degree of personal interaction (Keller-Schneider, 2018), social factors like support and acceptance within the school (Bar-Tal & Gilat, 2019), and the level of the individual teacher's commitment to teach (Hong, Day, & Greene, 2018). The teachers' perceptions of their support system and their perceptions of their own abilities also play a major role in how they adjust to their new career (Keller-Schneider, 2018; Goodman, et al., 2006).

The intrinsic and altruistic motivations that brought many of these second career teachers to teaching often result in shock when their idealistic views of teaching meet reality (Baeten & Meeus, 2016; Lee, 2011). First career teachers tend to be more prepared for this by their extensive field experience and classroom observation inherent to undergraduate teacher

preparation programs (Haggard et al., 2006). Keller-Schneider found that the risk of burnout is greatly increased in teachers who have unmet or unrealistic goals upon entering the career (2018). While the advanced work and life experience of second career teachers is valuable, it often comes with the drawback of shorter training experience that lacks extensive experience in the classroom (Haggard et al., 2006; Lee, 2011).

Second career teachers face other difficulties due to their age as well. They often must balance work, family, and other factors with their education, and many make social and financial sacrifices (Haggard et al., 2006;Lee, 2011; Bunn & Wake, 2015). The challenges of trying to balance their careers, education, and home lives often result in a deep sense of uncertainty that stems from a combination of strained personal relationships and financial hardship (Lee, 2011). Once they enter the classroom, they often find that their age and maturity results in higher demands and expectations from colleagues and administrators (Baeten & Meeus, 2016).

While second career teachers report lower levels of stress associated with colleague interactions and student management, they still report difficulty addressing the demands associated with student learning and assessment (Troesch & Bauer, 2020). Second career teachers report high levels of stress regarding daily teaching activities including lesson planning, content selection, student motivation, and differentiation (Baeten & Meeus, 2016). Career-related challenges are not necessarily contributors to emotional exhaustion and burnout so long as they are within the teacher's capability to accomplish or the teacher is well-supported enough to accomplish them (Keller-Schneider, 2018). However, these tasks can become risk factors if the teacher is met with repeated failures, which can lead to reduced feelings of self-efficacy (Keller-Schneider, 2018).

Change in professional status, especially if they were experts in their previous field can also be a source of stress to second career teachers (Baeten & Meeus, 2016; Haim & Amdur, 2016). Finally, second career teachers also report difficulty adjusting to bureaucracies and politics within schools (Lee, 2011), suggesting that there are limitations to the advantages in communication and networking that they enjoy. They are, however, more likely to change schools until they find a workplace culture that they are better able to fit into, perhaps at least in part due to reduced fear of professional change stemming from the fact that they are already changing careers (Lee, 2011).

The process of transitioning from a previous career into teaching is multi-faceted, requiring that the new teacher adjust to a career in which many different groups share a stake in the teacher's performance, to include colleagues, administrators, students, and parents (Haim & Amdur, 2016). They may additionally face difficulty setting boundaries between themselves and this community, especially with the increased access to teachers granted by advances in communication technology (Bar-Tal & Gilat, 2019). This can be further complicated by the need to adjust to a new set of social norms and adjust to potential ideological differences with the belief systems of their specific school (Haim & Amdur, 2016). The high number of interactions, especially interactions with known or unknown consequences that this career change requires has been shown to be emotionally exhausting (Keller-Schneider, 2018). If teachers are not properly prepared for this challenge or not properly supported as they navigate it, they are likely to socially withdraw or leave the profession entirely (Keller-Schneider, 2018).

Possible Solutions

Relatively little of the available literature focuses on second career teachers in their role as students, but some insight can be gained through an application of androgogy and transformative learning principles to what is known. The adult learning theory of androgogy sets

forth principles for fostering adult learning. These principles include the need for adult learners to recognize the real-world context of what they are learning and application in practice necessary to understand its use, the need for guided but self-directed learning, and the need to understand and challenge learners' existing assumptions and worldviews, which can either hinder learning or help to construct knowledge (Cox, 2015). Transformative learning espouses similar principles but with a greater focus on reflection, examination, challenging the learner's point of view/mental habits, as well as stimulating shifts in the learner's thinking (Cox, 2015).

Recent research suggests that a second career teacher's work and life experience only positively impact his or her ability to teach if these experiences are reflected upon and purposefully applied (Troesch & Bauer, 2020). This not only aligns with the theory of androgogy, but with Baeten & Meeus's (2016) assertion that second career teachers need mentors and educators who recognize their work/life experience and teach them how to meaningfully apply it to their new career. This may require some differentiation and personal knowledge of students' experience and perspective. Etherington (2011) asserts that teacher educators must understand the perspectives that second career teachers bring with them from previous careers in order to effectively educate them.

According to Brouwer (2007), second career teachers perceive their field experience as the most valuable form of preparation. The opportunity to immediately transfer the theory they learn in class to practice in a classroom setting solidifies the relevance of what they have learned (Brouwer, 2007). Brouwer (2007) even suggests close collaboration between teacher educators and their students' mentors to further facilitate this link between theory and practice. This is in direct alignment with androgogy's call to provide adult learners with real life applications and context for new knowledge. This call for increased social support and a strengthened mentor

network aligns with Keller-Schneider's findings on social support and guidance on burnout (2018).

Many second career teachers enter their training with a more traditional view of education and require a paradigm shift to engage fully with more modern teaching methods (Baeten & Meeus, 2016). Application of transformative learning theory can facilitate gradual changes in preconceived notions and shifts to a broader, more inclusive, more reflective way of thinking in adult learners (Cox, 2015). Once teachers enter the classroom, many find that the experience is vastly different from their expectation (Lee, 2011). Lee (2011) asserts that second career teachers need guidance reflecting on their life history and forming a new identity as a teacher.

Support for second career teachers can also focus on addressing the specific social challenges that are faced by second career teachers in teacher preparation programs. Haggard et al. (2006) suggest educating second career teachers in cohorts to combat the negative social effects of their busy schedules. Brouwer (2007) echoes the need for second career teachers to be educated in cohorts for the support, collaboration, and social benefits. A potential drawback of cohort style education is that it may infringe on adult learners' desire for self-directed learning and freedom of choice in selecting the timing of courses (Cox, 2015). Presenting an alternative, Lee (2011) suggests online communities where second career teachers can support each other through challenges they are familiar with, especially benefitting new entrants to the profession. This social support is an important aspect of second career teachers' transition, as many are used to working in teams or at least occasionally collaborating with others in their previous careers (Baeten & Meeus, 2016).

Further social support could address the shock of the career transition by training them on school structure, the various roles of the staff they will be interacting with, and the rights and duties of their new career (Bar-Tal & Gilat, 2019). The shock of their new environment may be further reduced by thoroughly mapping advancement tracks within the school system (Bar-Tal & Gilat, 2019) and familiarizing them with the dominant values of schools and classrooms (Haim & Amdur, 2016). Helping these career switchers fully understand the culture and hierarchies of their new career may reduce the emotionally fatiguing effect of the transition (Keller-Schneider, 2018).

Other practical considerations for addressing the challenges faced by second career teacher candidates include time and financial flexibility. While second career teachers benefit greatly from social and hands on learning, their busy schedules may necessitate that they take some of their courses online or at unusual times like at night or on Saturdays (Baeten & Meeus, 2016). Extended hours for services like advising and financial aid would benefit second career teachers as well (Baeten & Meeus, 2016). The financial hardship of returning to school can at least be partially addressed by service scholarships and forgivable loans, which can also increase retention rates (Gray & Taie, 2015).

Conclusion

Despite their heterogenous nature, second career teachers are a unique subset of education students with a variety of strengths to contribute and challenges to overcome. The literature on them is scarce, but sufficient to paint a clear picture of who they are and how they might be served. Second career teachers currently attend a wide variety of teacher education programs, and an understanding of their perceptions of early career teaching challenges may provide some insight about which of their needs are met and in which areas they may be struggling.

Preparing teacher candidates for these areas of struggle and helping them construct the necessary strengths to combat common challenges associated with teaching may help to reduce emotional exhaustion and burnout, which are major factors not only in teacher attrition rates. Emotionally exhausted teachers are more likely to socially withdraw, perceive challenges as more threatening and support as less helpful, and suffer from reduced quality of teaching and classroom environment (Keller-Schneider, 2018).

Methodology

A literature review on the demographics, backgrounds, and classroom experiences of second career teachers yielded the following research question for the focus of the researcher's EDCI 590 research: In what ways is there a difference between first career and second career teachers in frequency of feeling prepared versus unprepared in each focal aspect of teaching?

An online survey was dispersed through contacts made through the University of Mary Washington Master's in Education program and teaching in the Spotsylvania County Public School system. The survey was related to aspects of teaching including classroom management, lesson planning, differentiation, parent-teacher interaction, workplace community and work-life balance.

Participants and Setting

The survey was a convenience sample of active teachers to provide data about perceptions of teaching and preparation for the proposed research question for this study. Requests to participate with a link to the online survey were sent directly to active teachers as well as indirectly through colleagues at University of Mary Washington to reach as many qualifying participants as possible. Participation was limited to individuals who hold a Master's degree in education.

The survey, which was conducted online utilizing Qualtrics, included an explanation of the purpose of the study, a description of efforts to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, a request for participant consent, a request for confirmation that the participant is at least 18 years of age, and a detailed description of potential risks and benefits. Qualtrics is a password protected secure server and has the ability to provide participant anonymity. Participants who did not give consent or who answered that they were not at least 18 years of age were removed from the survey and the data pool.

Data Collection

The researcher created an anonymous cross-sectional survey on Qualtrics to run for four weeks, allowing respondents time to complete it around their schedules. The researcher acknowledges that a longitudinal study would be ideal but the timeframe for study completion as well as logistical constraints surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a single survey period.

The survey first asked respondents if teaching is their first career and what institutions they received their degrees from. For the purposes of this study, teaching was explained to be the respondent's second career if they held full time employment in another field for at least six months prior to beginning teacher education (Serow & Forrest, 1994). These questions included an option not to disclose the requested information. Any respondents who did not disclose their education and career information were removed from the survey and the data pool. This requirement and the rationale behind asking for such information were explicitly explained in the survey instructions.

Questions were kept short, avoided negatives and double negatives, and avoided asking more than one thing with a single question because there was no possibility of clarifying questions or providing additional instruction (Taherdoost, 2016). A pilot survey was conducted

to further eliminate any confusing questions, instructions, or format as well as to evaluate the survey for content validity and internal consistency (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). To enhance response consistency, the researcher used expanded format rather than the Likert scale (Kam & Chan, 2020). Rather than asking a respondent to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement on a number scale, the researcher worded answers as complete sentences indicating different levels of agreement or disagreement.

Questions asked respondents to report on their feelings of preparedness for various aspects of teaching, including classroom management, lesson planning, differentiation, parent-teacher interaction, workplace community, and work-life balance. Respondents were also asked to report their feelings on networking opportunities with active teachers during their education, either through practicum or guests brought into their courses. They were then asked to report their feelings on the impact or lack thereof that contact with these teachers had on their preparation. Respondents were also asked whether these teachers were first or second career teachers (with an option to select that they do not know). Finally, the survey concluded with an open-ended question giving respondents the opportunity to highlight areas of strength or weakness they perceived in their education to demonstrate potential unforeseen limitations of the survey or areas for future study.

Data Analysis

At the end of the survey period, the researcher exported data from Qualtrics and analyzed it in Microsoft Excel. Prior to analysis, data was coded and all identifying information was removed to ensure confidentiality in participation. Mean responses of first career and second career teachers to each numerical response question were compared using box plots and bar plots (de Winter & Dodou, 2010).

Limitations

Limitations of an online survey include potential for low response numbers and the potential for participant confusion during the survey (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It is also possible that impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic caused teachers to need to prioritize other tasks with their time. The researcher ran a pilot survey to revise the survey in an effort to limit confusion as much as possible. The pilot survey was administered to one teacher online, whose results were not included in the survey results. This survey excluded teachers who graduated from alternative route teacher education programs that don't confer Master's degrees. Future study may consider including these teachers.

Findings

Out of the twenty-five questions asked of survey participants, first and second career teachers only reported significantly different feelings of preparedness in response to nine of the questions. While the study's main focus was to identify aspects of teaching for which second career teachers felt either more or less prepared than their first career counterparts, the survey also revealed aspects of teaching for which both categories felt either very well or very poorly prepared. Since trends in responses are complex, discussion of findings is divided into the subcategories of classroom management, lesson planning, differentiation, parent-teacher interaction, workplace community, and work-life balance.

Classroom Management

While both first career and second career teachers felt moderately prepared for addressing student disinterest (about 60 percent positive response rates for both, with most responses trending toward the middle), responses to other classroom management questions were much more negative. When asked about dealing with disruptive students, 75 percent of first career teachers and 50 percent of second career teachers responded that they often felt unprepared by

their education to do so. When asked about dealing with severe misbehavior, 80 percent of first career teachers and 64 percent of second career teachers responded that they often or always felt unprepared by their education to do so. When asked about managing field trips, 65 percent of first career teachers and 50 percent of second career teachers responded that they often or always felt unprepared by their education to do so.

Lesson Planning

When asked about planning effective lessons, 80 percent of first career teachers and 85 percent of second career teachers responded that they felt often or always prepared by their education to do so (with 30 percent of first career teachers and 28 percent of second career teachers responding that they always felt prepared to do so). Almost identical numbers were produced by the question asking if they felt prepared to develop a variety of lessons. Ninety percent of both first and second career teachers responded that they often or always felt prepared by their education to address standards in lesson planning (with 50 percent of first career and 43 percent of second career teachers responding with always). Compared with most other questions, these were notably positive response rates.

First and second career teachers did deviate on some aspects of lesson planning. For example, 49 percent of second career teachers reported feeling often or always prepared by their education to teach social-emotional learning, versus 35 percent of first career teachers. Ninety-five percent of first career teachers reported feeling often (40 percent) or always (55 percent) prepared by their education to design rubrics and grading systems, versus 78 percent of second career teachers, only 7 percent of whom reported feeling always prepared. One hundred percent of first career teachers reported feeling often (85 percent) or always (15 percent) prepared to adapt lessons to unexpected obstacles, versus 79 percent of second career teachers, with 14 percent reporting always feeling prepared.

Differentiation

Fifty-five percent of both first and second career teachers responded that they often or always felt prepared by their education to differentiate lessons for different tiered learners. Sixty-five percent of first career teachers reported feeling often (50 percent) or always (15 percent) prepared to differentiate for special education students, versus 56 percent of second career teachers, 28 percent of whom reported always feeling prepared. Only 10 percent of first career teachers and 14 percent of second career teachers reported feeling often or always prepared by their education to differentiate for English language learners.

Parent-teacher Interaction

Seventy percent of first career teachers and 63 percent of second career teachers reported feeling often or always prepared by their education to build relationships with parents and guardians. Sixty percent of first career and 63 percent of second career teachers reported feeling often or always prepared by their education to run parent conferences. Sixty percent of first career teachers reported feeling often (40 percent) or always (20 percent) prepared by their education to contribute meaningfully to IEP meetings, versus only 42 percent of second career teachers. Only 15 percent of first career teachers reported often feeling prepared by their education to deal with upset parents, versus 56 percent of second career teachers.

Workplace Community

Fifty-five percent of first career teachers and 56 percent of second career teachers reported feeling often or always prepared by their education to address the concerns for administrators. Very similar high numbers of both first and second career teachers reported feeling often or always prepared to seek help from peers (90 percent), utilize school resources (70 percent), and build relationships with other teachers (85 percent). Sixty-five percent of first

career teachers reported feeling prepared to network within their school, versus 50 percent of second career teachers.

Work-life Balance

The submitted data suggests a lack of work-life balance among both first career and second career teachers. Only 30 percent of both first and second career teachers expressed often feeling prepared by their education to manage stress. Thirty percent of first career teachers reported feeling often or always prepared to establish self-care habits, versus 14 percent of second career teachers. Eighty percent of first career teachers reported feeling often or always prepared to manage their time, versus only 50 percent of second career teachers.

Discussion

The survey yielded some results that agreed with the literature and some that did not. In some areas, first and second career teacher respondents varied widely in their feelings of preparedness and in others they agreed almost unanimously. Interpretation of these results and their limitations is broken down into the subcategories of classroom management, lesson planning, differentiation, parent-teacher interaction, workplace community, and work-life balance.

Classroom Management

First career and second career teacher responses regarding dealing with student disinterest were close to equal and slightly positive. Second career teachers held strong advantages over their first career counterparts in areas of disruptive students, severe misbehavior, and managing field trips. Age may be a major contributing factor, especially since all questions were worded such that they asked respondents about their feelings during their first year teaching after graduation from their Master's program. Other researchers have found that in addition to age, second career teachers feel less discomfort dealing with student misbehavior early in their

careers due to the fact that many already have children of their own when they start teaching (Baeten & Meeus, 2016; Bar-Tal & Gilat, 2019). Regardless of any apparent advantages of second career teachers, no question about classroom management yielded a strong positive response from either group and may be an area of consideration for teacher education programs, especially traditional path five-year programs that graduate young teachers.

Lesson Planning

Questions about lesson planning yielded the most consistently positive responses from both first career and second career teachers. Though both groups provided mostly positive responses to these questions, first career teachers felt more prepared than their second career counterparts in most categories, especially in rubric design. This echoes much of the literature and can likely be attributed to the additional years of teacher-specific education and field experience most first career teachers receive (Haggard, et al., 2006).

One notable exception to this is social-emotional learning, where neither group felt strongly prepared, but second career teachers held an advantage. This may again be attributed to factors like age, percentage of respondents who had children of their own early in their teaching careers (Baeten & Meeus, 2016), or to factors like life experience, which not only affect how teachers perceive classroom challenges, but also how they perceive and respond to their education (Bar-Tal & Gilat, 2019; Goodman, et al., 2006).

It should be noted that questions about planning effective lessons and addressing standards yielded very strong positive responses among both groups. This suggests that teacher education programs are thoroughly addressing these areas for different types of education students.

Differentiation

Questions about differentiation yielded comparatively few positive responses and may warrant further consideration or study by teacher education programs. First career teachers felt more prepared than second career teachers to differentiate for special education students, which may again be attributed to their larger amount of time both in education courses and supervised field experience (Haggard, et al., 2006; Brouwer, 2007; Lee, 2011;). Questions that yielded agreement between both first career and second career teachers were especially telling. With only half of respondents of either group answering positively about differentiating for different tiered learners and both groups responding almost unanimously that they were unprepared to differentiate for English Language Learners, teacher education programs may need to examine closely how they teach differentiation, regardless of their target student population.

Parent-Teacher Interaction

Despite much of the literature agreeing that second career teachers were more equipped to interact with parents, responses to most parent interaction questions were equal or favored first career teachers. First career teachers reported feeling slightly more prepared to build relationships with parents, much more prepared to contribute meaningfully to IEP meetings, and equally prepared to run parent conferences when compared to their second career counterparts. Rather than suggest a lack of preparation on the part of second career teachers, these results may actually show that teacher education programs are preparing traditional five year track students to interact with parents well enough that they feel as prepared as second career teachers who are older, more experienced, and may be parents themselves. Dealing with upset parents was the one glaring exception to this, with almost no first career teachers feeling prepared, versus half of their second career counterparts. The literature suggests that this may be due to second career teachers' advanced communication skills and maturity related to life experience and previous

careers (Baeten & Meeus, 2016; Bar-Tal & Gilat, 2019; Troesch & Baeur 2020), but may also simply be a matter of age and resultant parent perception of the teacher. While they can't teach their students to be older, teacher education programs may consider the advantages yielded by teachers' previous careers and model customer service or other workplace conflict resolution training.

Workplace Community

Though much of the literature suggests that second career teachers are more equipped by their previous work experience to navigate the school as a workplace, responses to questions in this category were almost identical between first career and second career teachers. In seeming direct contradiction to the literature, first career teachers reported feeling more prepared to network within schools than their second career counterparts. This may be attributed to the successes of teacher education programs in preparing their first career teachers for the workplace such that they are not behind their peers who have already held careers in other fields. It may also be because schools are very complex workplaces that don't follow traditional employer hierarchies and can be very difficult to adjust to regardless of previous work experience (Haim & Amdur, 2016). Second career teachers must work through a paradigm shift as they shed previous beliefs about both education and the workplace and learn to navigate their new environment (Haim & Amdur, 2016; Lee, 2011; Haggard, et al., 2006).

It is worth noting that while most respondents felt very prepared to seek help from peers, utilize school resources, and build relationships with other teachers, only half of respondents from either category felt prepared to address the concerns of administrators. Bar-Tal and Gilat's recommendation that second career teachers be explicitly taught the intricacies of school structure, organization roles, and advancement tracks (2019) may need to be applied to education students of all backgrounds.

Work-Life Balance

Despite much literature touting the time management and coping skills (Hunter-Johnston, 2015), multitasking abilities (Grier & Johnston, 2009), and stress resilience (Bar-Tal & Gilat, 2019; Troesch & Bauer 2020), very few respondents of either group responded positively to questions about stress or self-care. Contrary to much of the literature, most first career teachers reported feeling prepared to manage their time, versus only half of second career teachers. Further research may uncover the reasons behind this, but it may again fall to the extended field experience of first career teachers prior to their first year teaching. Regardless, the overwhelming negative response to questions about work-life balance suggest either a lack of preparedness for teaching-specific stresses or, perhaps more likely, too many such stresses to deal with regardless of preparation and training. This would align with the literature that suggests many teachers struggle with the duality of a job that is both extremely fulfilling but also extremely stressful and time-consuming (Bar-Tal & Gilat, 2019).

Limitations

In addition to those limitations of methodology already addressed, these results may further be limited by sample size, sample population, and timing. With twenty first career teachers and fourteen second career teachers responding, the results are interesting, but should be considered a starting point for future research rather than a decisive conclusion about the conditions of teacher education.

Respondents were all active teachers and future studies may consider including those who have left their careers in teaching for a clearer picture of teacher preparation, stress, and attrition. Further, distribution methods likely resulted in a sample of mostly central Virginia teachers and results may differ significantly with a broader sample. Respondents departed from the expectations of the literature enough to reinforce the idea that teachers, especially second

career teachers, are a heterogenous group and no one study is likely to capture a perfect picture of their strengths and needs.

Finally, this survey was distributed in October 2020 while many teachers in the distribution districts were either teaching online or transitioning from online teaching to hybrid teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. While questions were worded to apply to the respondents' first year teaching after graduation, some respondents answered that they were currently in their first year teaching. Under global pandemic circumstances, questions of stress may have been colored by respondents' own stress levels related to larger events. The same can be said for classroom management, lesson planning, and many other aspects of teaching that look completely different in the current setting. Further, the increased workload of teaching during a pandemic may have deprived the survey of some teachers who would have responded under normal circumstances. Some principals declined to distribute the survey in their schools due to its timing. It is difficult to tell what impact such a response bias may have had on the data.

Conclusion

Second career teachers are a rapidly growing demographic of teachers. They bring specific strengths to their new profession and face unique challenges both during and after their education. Understanding what aspects of teaching they do or do not feel prepared for can assist education programs in efforts to address their unique needs as students. Education, training, and support tailored to the specific needs and strengths of second career teachers could possibly help combat attrition and improve the quality of the education their students receive in turn. Though the goal of this research was to find aspects of teaching for which there were differences between first career and second career teachers in feelings of preparedness, some of the questions on which both groups seemed to agree were just as telling.

While teacher education programs seem to be doing a fantastic job of preparing their students for tasks like lesson planning, other areas like differentiation, classroom management, parent interactions, workplace community, and work-life balance seem to be areas of glaring need. The negative response to preparedness for differentiation for English language learners is particularly disturbing and worth further investigation. Education students are prepared to teach, but not prepared for the multitude of tasks required of them outside of teaching. Participant 12, a second career teacher, succinctly summed up this issue in the free response section: "I had a great education in how to handle writing and designing great lessons, but very little for everything else. The 'everything else' that includes parents, admin, other teachers, and anything not directly related to the lesson at hand is a very large part of teaching, sometimes larger than the actual teaching itself."

There were areas of difference that shed some light on the research question: "In what ways is there a difference between first career and second career teachers in frequency of feeling prepared versus unprepared in each focal aspect of teaching?" Teacher education programs may do well to seek further information as to why second career teachers are graduating feeling more capable of dealing with major classroom misbehaviors, upset parents, and social emotional learning, which are all unavoidable aspects of any given year in teaching. Further research may reveal whether it's age alone that accounts for the difference or if the experiences of career switchers informs their perceptions of their training and of the challenges themselves.

Further, the advantages first career teachers held in time management, self-care habits, networking within schools, and adapting lessons to obstacles were all surprisingly contrary to much of the available research. Teacher education programs whose student populations are comprised largely of second career teachers may benefit from an investigation into why the

older, more experienced professionals they are retraining are not as prepared as their younger, less experienced colleagues whose first career is teaching. If workplace experience does not translate to preparedness for the workplace environment found in schools, more training on exactly what that environment entails may be necessary. Regardless of the apparent advantages first career teachers may hold in work-life balance, the responses were disturbingly negative overall. Further investigation may reveal ways to reduce burnout and attrition.

Teaching is such a vastly complex profession that it is very difficult to prepare future teachers for each component. Teacher education programs have a limited amount of time to transform their students into professionals in a unique field capable of handling an array of unique challenges. This research's intent was to find ways that teacher education programs can reduce the stress and shock of entering the profession, and thereby hopefully reduce attrition rates, which are costly both in monetary terms and in terms of loss of quality education for students. It is unlikely that any program will ever do this perfectly, but a clearer picture of who education students are and what their education is currently preparing them for least may provide some insight on where universities, schools, administrators, and teachers can best allocate their limited time, staff, and resources.

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Appendix A

Feelings of preparedness in first career versus second career teachers
SAMPLE INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Brief Description

The purpose of this research is to investigate how prepared by their education for various teaching challenges first and second career teachers feel. This information will help form considerations for establishing or improving teacher education programs directed toward both second career and traditional career path teachers. Individuals who volunteer to participate in this study will answer relevant survey questions. No identifying information will be archived or published and it will take about 8-13 minutes of your time. There are few, if any risks to participants in this study. Respondents will be entered into a raffle for an Amazon gift card. This raffle will not affect the anonymity of participant responses. There are no other direct benefits or rewards for completing this survey. **Please read the remainder of this form before deciding if you want to volunteer to be in this research study.**

My name is John. I am a graduate student at the University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg, Virginia, and I am seeking your consent to participate in this research study. Involvement in the study is voluntary, so you may choose to participate or not. The information below explains the study in detail. Before volunteering, please ask any questions that you may have about the research; I will be happy to explain anything in greater detail.

Details of Participant Involvement

I am interested in learning more about how first career and second career teachers learn and apply knowledge to practice. I am also interested in how prepared teachers feel by their education for the realities of the classroom and potential supports for addressing areas of challenge. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to answer multiple-choice, ranking, and category scale (agree/disagree) style questions. Questions will also include demographic data about your role as a teacher; and will also ask about past and present employment status, your teacher education, mentorship, etc.

Privacy and Confidentiality

All information about participants is entirely anonymous. This means that your name or other identifying information will not appear in any data collected or in any reports of this research, and neither I nor anyone else will know your identity or be able to associate you with your data. When the research is complete, I will destroy all participant data.

Risks and Benefits of Participation

The only foreseeable risk to participants in this survey is possible discomfort in answering survey questions about your personal opinions and experiences online. However, you do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. The benefit of this research is that it may contribute to better general understanding of perceived challenges faced in the classroom by both first and second career teachers. It may also provide greater insight into preparing teachers of both types with education and training specific to their needs. There are no direct benefits to you as a participant.

Participant Rights
If you do not want to participate in this survey, there will be no penalties. As a voluntary participant in this research, you have the right to refuse to answer any questions. This research has been approved by the University of Mary Washington Institutional Review Board, a committee responsible for ensuring that the safety and rights of research participants are protected. For information about your rights as a research participant, contact the IRB chair, …

Contact Information
For more information about this research before, during or after your participation, please contact me, John Deemy (jdeemy@mail.umw.edu) or my university supervisor, Dr. Guth (nguth2@umw.edu). To report any unanticipated problems relating to the research that you experience during or following your participation, contact my university supervisor, Dr. Guth (nguth2@umw.educox).

To be Completed by Participant
I have read all of the information on this form, and all of my questions and concerns about the research described above have been addressed. I choose, voluntarily, to participate in this research project. I certify that I am at least 18 years of age.

Select option:

- Yes (continue to survey questions)
- No (close the survey website)

If respondents select "No," the survey will be terminated using Qualtrics' skip logic technology. If respondents select "Yes," they will move ahead to Q2.