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THE VALUE OF PRIOR PROFESSIONAL SKILLS
AND EXPERIENCES: PERCEPTIONS
OF SECOND-CAREER TEACHERS

by

David M. Kahn

Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of
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the Degree of

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in

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THE VALUE OF PRIOR PROFESSIONAL SKILLS
AND EXPERIENCES: PERCEPTIONS
OF SECOND-CAREER TEACHERS

by

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Dissertation

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DEDICATION

My wife, Debbie, has provided me with love and support beyond what any one person deserves. There is no question that my successes in life would not have been possible without her infinite compassion, her unwavering loyalty, and her generous heart and sweet disposition. But most of all, I am grateful for the opportunity to be with someone who works so hard to ensure that those less fortunate have a strong voice and a fighting chance to succeed in reaching their goals. With my deepest appreciation, I say thank you for making my life meaningful and making the world a better place.

ABSTRACT

Second-career teachers' pathways to teaching are often different from the traditional pathways of first-career teachers. This hermeneutic phenomenological study explored the common traits that second-career teachers share that may be unique within education, and whether second-career teachers' prior skills and experiences assisted them in their new profession. The study also examined whether second-career teachers perceived that their certification programs helped them to develop their teacher identities and taught them to utilize their prior work experiences. Finally, this study investigated whether second-career teachers believed that administrators valued their distinctive abilities. Data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews illustrating the individual experiences of 12 second-career teachers. Data were analyzed to develop emergent themes that provided answers to the four research questions guiding this study. The conclusions presented new insight into the high value second-career teachers place on their prior professional skills and experiences. Evidence also suggested that second-career teachers do not believe certification programs and district administrators place the same value on those skills and experiences. In order to reduce attrition of second-career teachers it is recommended that administrators recognize, develop, and utilize their prior professional skills and experiences as a resource for students and colleagues.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Second-career teachers' pathways to teaching are often different from the traditional pathways of first-career teachers leading to a different set of skills and experiences that can be relied on in the classroom. The intrinsic value of second-career teachers' unique characteristics makes them ideal for recruitment into the teaching profession, and those unique characteristics should be recognized, accepted, developed, and supported once they enter the classroom (Williams & Forgasz, 2009; Wilson & Deaney, 2010). Brindley and Parker (2010) argued that a shortage of qualified teachers world-wide has led to many varied pathways to certification for second-career teachers, yet they also discovered limited research on the effectiveness of those programs. Further, Berg (2004) described little research comparing the distinct approaches first- and second-career teachers utilized in the classroom. Finally, Davis, Petish, and Smithey (2006) found that studies examining the role of certification programs and how they support the needs of second-career teachers are not extensive.

The researcher is a second-career teacher, having worked in numerous healthcare settings over nearly 20 years before embarking on a second career in education. This researcher, as a classroom teacher, attributed much success to the sum of those experiences and to the professional skills developed in that previous career. Further, the researcher's experiences working in a school environment alongside many teachers with varied pathways to the classroom has led to the belief that second-career teachers possess

attributes that are different from more traditional, first-career teachers. While those attributes are described here as being different, that by no means suggests that second-career teachers are in any way better teachers. Instead, the researcher examined whether those attributes are in fact different, and if so, how those differences can be translated into a successful educational environment.

Statement of the Problem

Conflicts between second-career teachers' expectations and actual classroom experiences can be mitigated through education programs and peer mentoring, so that those teachers utilize their previously learned skills and also create useful connections between their first and second careers (Castro & Bauml, 2009; Chambers, 2002). Backes and Burns (2008) suggested that second-career teachers enter teaching and choose to remain in education due to a small number of motivating factors, and that alerting recruiters and administrators to these motivating factors will result in a reduction in the attrition rate of qualified second-career teachers.

This study examined second-career teachers' perceptions of the value of their prior professional skills and experiences during their first years teaching. These findings can provide insight to those contemplating switching careers and entering the teaching profession by presenting ways in which second-career teachers can utilize their previous professional skills and experiences to overcome obstacles once they enter the classroom. The findings may also prove useful to school administrators seeking qualified candidates for teaching positions and may also impact how teacher preparation programs are designed for second-career teachers, in order to lower attrition rates of second-career teachers.

Background

Teacher Identity

When teaching is viewed as an identity rather than as a role, teachers are more likely to reflect on the importance of the relationships between their values, intentions, and practices leading to more success in the classroom (Bérci, 2007; Etherington, 2011; Jarvis-Selinger, Pratt, & Collins, 2010). Personal identities develop over time and evolve through lived experiences. Second-career teachers must often undergo a shift in their identity from that of their prior professional persona to that of a classroom teacher. Kember (2008) found that second-career teachers' beliefs about teaching are linked to their past professional experiences, beliefs, and expectations about teaching. While many second-career teachers enter the profession with their teaching identities fully formed, for many others the development is an on-going process. Grier and Johnston (2009) suggested that second-career teachers developed their classroom identities over time by incorporating aspects of their prior professional careers. Wilson and Deaney (2010) argued that teacher identity development constitutes a process during teacher education programs whereby teachers' identities form, they begin to define themselves as teachers, and then they are regarded by others as teachers. While every teacher experiences this process in one form or another, this was particularly relevant for second career teachers who had to develop a new classroom identity independent of their prior professional identity (Wilson & Deaney).

Teachers who enter the classroom with a strong teacher identity are often more successful than those with a less-developed teacher identity. Kouri (2009) indicated that second-career teachers' classroom practices were shaped by their personal narratives, and

incorporated within those teacher narratives were personal beliefs about teaching practice, curriculum, and their students. The development of those attributes often enabled second-career teachers to enjoy more success in the classroom. Jeanpierre (2007) stated that teachers' beliefs were important as they related to their teaching practices, and that second-career teachers expressed the importance of having substantial support from administrators and mentors during their first years of teaching. Kouri also found that second-career teachers who had developed a strong personal teacher identity readily incorporated prior workplace experiences and personal classroom knowledge into curriculum development.

Fry and Anderson (2011) found that unique challenges arose when second career teachers tried adjusting to new professional expectations while simultaneously developing their own new professional and personal identities. Bérci (2007) argued that conflict often existed between teachers' beliefs, roles, and identities and their need to meet the required responsibilities in the classroom. Often, second-career teachers perceived their identities one way while colleagues and administrators viewed those identities differently. Trent and Gao (2009) found that second-career teachers' skills and experiences were sometimes not valued within their schools, and that was reflected in the disconnect between the way colleagues and administrators perceived the teachers and the way in which the teachers perceived themselves. This divide was not due to a mischaracterization by either side, but instead Trent and Gao argued that the particular skills sets and procedures associated with one group may not have been accepted by another. On the other hand, Berg (2004) found that principals had higher expectations of

his subjects based on their prior work experience, and one subject was given feedback from his principal stating that his progress was superior to most first-career teachers.

Conflict can arise when second-career teachers feel that colleagues and administrators do not value their identities and skills to the extent that those teachers feel is appropriate. Etherington (2011) stated that a suspected lack of support from faculty resulted in a higher frequency of confrontations and other negative incidents between faculty and second-career teachers resulting in feelings of isolation. Further, the experiences with prior professional cultures that second-career teachers incorporated into their new profession often caused a disparity between the new teachers' expectations of, and transition into, the classroom (Morton, Williams, & Brindley, 2006). Those conflicts were less frequent with first-career teachers who often entered teaching with less developed teacher identities and therefore found it easier to conform to school culture. Etherington also argued that when second-career teachers' experiences were not reflective of their perceived identities, they may have altered their behaviors in order to assimilate into their environments. When second-career teachers perceived inadequate support for their personal identities and beliefs, they often resisted attempts by colleagues and administrators to change them. Gilbert (2011) stated that teacher resistance often began as a mechanism for defending beliefs, but sustaining that resistance led to frustration and dissatisfaction that ultimately resulted in attrition.

Newman (2010) described the importance of matching second-career teachers' expectations to classroom realities in order to maximize retention of those new teachers. Newman found that the teachers' abilities to capitalize on their previous work experiences were significant in achieving job satisfaction. Most second-career teachers

viewed themselves as experienced and wished their previous work experiences to be acknowledged and supported by their colleagues. Newman concluded that there was a need for certification programs to prepare second-career teachers to join their past work identities with their new teacher identities in order to maximize success. Further, Trent and Gao (2009) concluded that to ensure the success of second-career teachers, schools should acknowledge that the competencies those teachers brought from their previous careers played an important role in identity formation.

Prior Skills and Experiences

Entering any new work environment can present challenges to workers, and as second-career teachers enter the classroom for the first time they must overcome certain unfamiliar obstacles. Often, the relative success of second-career teachers depended on their ability to overcome those obstacles quickly and efficiently (Harms & Knobloch, 2005). Castro and Bauml (2009) interviewed 14 second-career teachers and found that their participants incorporated their prior skill sets and experiences when confronted with challenges. Further, the larger the challenges facing new second-career teachers, the more likely they were to believe in the value of their prior professional experiences in meeting those challenges (Berger & D'Ascoli, 2012). In addition to the perceived obstacles many new teachers faced, the normal, day-to-day academic and administrative responsibilities teachers must accomplish also provided a challenge. Grier and Johnston (2009) suggested that second-career teachers often relied on skills developed in their previous careers to navigate through the requirements and responsibilities of their new profession.

Prior professional experiences can provide invaluable portable skills that can be utilized outside of their initial and intended environments. Crow, Levine, and Nager

(1990) found that some second-career teachers, having attained competence in their prior professions, were bothered by their own feelings of incompetence in their new environments. This often led to dissatisfaction and discontent in their new roles as teachers. However, second-career teachers who acknowledged the differences between their old and new work environments were more apt to recognize the value of skills they learned in their first professions, and were more likely to apply those skills to solve new problems. Crow et al. concluded that second-career teachers who perceived continuity between past skills and present demands were more likely to negotiate their new environments with greater success than those who perceived a disparity between the past and the present.

Classroom practice within a school environment presents many unique characteristics usually not found in a corporate environment. Those characteristics include social networks and organizational networks that may be arranged in unfamiliar manners, as well as the overall cultures and climates of the work environment. LaRocco and Bruns (2006) conducted a study in which their subjects clearly indicated that they struggled with managing the day-to-day responsibilities of their new positions, and their prior professional experiences did not appear to lessen the effect of those struggles. However, the authors did find that second-career teachers had learned the value of social support through their previous professional experiences, which allowed them to mitigate their challenges more quickly and efficiently.

Berg (2004) found that as in other professions, teachers are often socialized into the education environment through learning the attitudes, values, behaviors, and beliefs necessary for assuming an effective role in the organization. Second-career teachers who

could accept the attributes of their new work cultures without compromising their own beliefs and values were more likely to assimilate into their new roles successfully. Often, prior work positively influenced second-career teachers' abilities to embrace their new culture, values, and belief systems, helping them to be more successful and effective teachers (Berg).

In addition to relying on prior professional skills and experiences to overcome perceived obstacles, many second-career teachers utilized those assets to improve their overall abilities to teach their curricula. Greenwood (2003) stated that the resulting personal pedagogical content knowledge of new teachers, together with their previous experiences, directed their approaches to classroom instruction. By incorporating their prior experiences directly into their lessons, second-career teachers provided their students with perspectives and real-world applications of the concepts they taught, thereby delivering a deeper level of understanding. Greenwood also argued that prior professional experiences often provided teachers with the background knowledge to simulate within their classrooms real-world, professional, problem-solving skills. McDonald (2007) interviewed four second-career science teachers and found that all four participants clearly recalled critical events from their prior work and science education experiences that they applied in teaching new concepts to their students.

Mitchell and Romero (2010) collected data that suggested school employers hire teachers that were not only knowledgeable in course content but were also professionally-oriented and well-trained. However, Jenne (1997) argued that the perception that second-career teachers entered the profession with valuable transferable skills was erroneous and that the superficial technical aspects of teaching simply made those second-career

teachers appear attractive to hiring administrators. Jenne further stated that those individuals had given the illusion of having mastered the process of teaching while actually remaining ignorant or naive about the substantive issues of teaching and learning.

When compared with first-career teachers, the inherently different experiences and characteristics of second-career teachers often present unique needs that must be addressed by their colleagues and administrators in order for the teachers to remain successful. Morton et al. (2006) conducted a study indicating that mentors expressed beliefs that second-career teachers were more mature and committed to teaching than traditional interns, and were consequently expected to take on responsibilities earlier in the student teaching internship. However, Morton et al. also found that when second-career teachers employed their prior skills, such as contributing to strategic conversations or questioning directions, mentors often felt disrespected, leading to strained relationships. Hedrick (2005) concluded that retaining second-career teachers was linked to how well colleagues and administrators responded to their needs as a population distinctly different from first-career teachers.

Certification Programs

Rosenberg, Boyer, Sindelar, and Misra (2007) stated that second-career teachers make up the largest demographic of alternative certification programs. Students enrolled in alternative certification programs had vastly different skills, experiences, and therefore needs, than did students enrolled in more traditional certification programs. Those programs often streamlined the training process because second-career teachers frequently brought related backgrounds and experiences that facilitated more rapid

acquisition of concepts related to education (Rosenberg et al.). Further, Wilcox and Samaras (2009) argued that given any alternative teacher preparation program, second-career teachers needed learning experiences in programs that recognized their distinctive characteristics and took their unique experiences, motivations, and skills into account.

While second-career teachers usually recognized their own unique experiences and needs, they often did not receive the support they required to succeed. Crow et al.'s (1990) participants criticized their graduate education programs for failing to help them produce a better fit between their unique backgrounds and their new teaching environments. Walsh, Abi-Nader, and Poutiatine (2005) argued that teacher educators could have better prepared second-career teachers for the classroom if they had understood those students' perspectives and experiences concerning motivation and learning readiness, expectations of self, as well as demands for practical information, time demands, and placement expectations.

Once they enter the classroom, second-career teachers face many obstacles that can prevent them from achieving a successful career, yet many of those obstacles can be overcome if the teachers are properly prepared. The first step is for certification programs to inform second-career teachers properly of classroom expectations. Etherington (2011) suggested that certification programs must learn how best to utilize the expectations, skills, and experiences of older second-career teachers in order to meet the realities of their classroom environments. Second, teacher education programs must address the unique needs of second-career teachers by increasing field experiences and by providing classroom management and time management strategies (Fry & Anderson, 2011). Finally, Bérci (2007) argued that certification programs not only need to recognize that

conflicts often exist between teachers' beliefs, roles, and identities, and the need to meet their required responsibilities in the classroom; but the programs must also address this issue and provide guidance for second-career teachers in order to alleviate that conflict once those teachers enter the classroom.

Research Questions

To gain further knowledge of second-career teachers' perceptions of the value of their prior professional experience, this study will explore the following questions:

1. What common characteristics do second-career teachers share that may be unique within the field of education?
2. How do second-career teachers perceive that their teacher education programs or alternative certification processes helped them learn to utilize their prior work experiences?
3. How have second-career teachers' maturity levels, skills, and experiences in their previous careers facilitated them in their new education profession?
4. What value do second-career teachers believe administrators and colleagues place on the unique abilities they bring into the educational environment?

Description of Terms

In order to appreciate fully the information presented in this research study, it is necessary to understand the meanings of several terms within the context of this study.

The terms and definitions for this study are as follows:

Alternative Certification Program. An alternative certification program is an education program leading to teacher certification and undertaken by older adults in order to enter the teaching profession after having been employed in a non-educational

profession. Certification includes the administrative processes by which teachers are granted a teaching license in their particular state (Rosenberg et al., 2007).

Bracketing. Bracketing requires suspending one's prejudices and personal biases in order to understand the meanings of experiences as they are for those describing them (Cohen, Kahn, & Steeves, 2000).

Hermeneutic Phenomenology. Hermeneutic phenomenology describes a qualitative research methodology that examines the lived experiences of study participants through the accumulation of written data. The researcher considers his or her own similar experiences as meaningful data emerges through interviews and other written artifacts (Holroyd, 2011).

Phenomenological Reduction. Phenomenological reduction describes the process of reducing the particular facts of an experience down to its general essences (Cohen et al., 2000).

Phenomenology. Phenomenology is a qualitative method of inquiry concerned with investigating the perceptions of lived experiences in order to gain meaning. The researcher is careful to remove, or "bracket out," his or her own experiences (Groenewald, 2004).

Second-Career Teacher. A second-career teacher is an educator who chose to become a teacher after first graduating from college and pursuing another career outside of education (Greenwood, 2003).

Teacher Identity. Teacher identity refers to the ways in which teachers think about their teaching, learning, and roles within the classroom and within the school (Jarvis-Selinger et al., 2010).

Teacher Mentoring. Teacher mentoring programs are put in place in schools to serve as an apprenticeship for new teachers who work under the leadership and direction of an experienced and accomplished veteran teacher (Castro & Bauml, 2009).

Traditional Certification Program. These programs provide educational training and certification for teachers with little or no previous work experience who enter the teaching profession immediately upon graduating from college (Rosenberg et al., 2007).

Significance of the Study

New teacher attrition has long been a problem that must be addressed in order to conserve the limited resources currently plaguing education. DeAngelis and Presley (2011) found that five-year exit rates of new public school teachers were generally lower in recent years, possibly due to the mentoring and induction programs that have increased in an effort to reduce new teacher attrition. School systems that were aware of second-career teachers' unique professional development needs, as compared with first-career teachers, ultimately reduced attrition rates (Cuddapah, Beaty-O'Ferrall, Masci & Hetrick, 2011). Harms and Knobloch (2005) argued that positive first-year teaching experiences led to lower attrition rates. By informing school administrators of the unique needs of second-career teachers, attrition can be reduced and students can benefit from more experienced, talented teachers.

Davis et al. (2006) argued that further studies must compare programs for second-career teachers with traditional programs serving first-career teachers to analyze any differences in outcomes once the teachers enter the classroom. Davis et al. concluded that once effective supports and pathways toward overcoming obstacles have been identified, the next step would be to incorporate those processes into the training curricula of all

certification programs. Examining the obstacles that second-career teachers face can lead to the development of strategies to overcome those obstacles. Jeanpierre (2007) concluded that the second-career teachers' experiences may have provided guidance for developing teacher preparation programs that better facilitated the transition of second-career teachers to education. Ultimately, according to Boyer (2004), certification programs that ignored the concerns of second-career teachers indirectly led to high attrition rates among those teachers.

Process to Accomplish

To answer the research questions, the researcher conducted a hermeneutic phenomenological examination of second-career teachers. Groenewald (2004) stated that phenomenology is a qualitative methodology that focuses on understanding social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of the people who experience them. In pure phenomenological analysis, the researcher is careful to remove, or "bracket out," (p. 18) his own experiences; however, as a second-career teacher, the researcher utilized hermeneutic phenomenology whereby the researcher's own experiences are an integral part of the process of interpreting the meaning of phenomena (Holroyd, 2011). Lee (2011) stated that the researcher's own personal experiences should be used as a reference by which he or she may interpret the data as it relates to the event or phenomenon examined. Although Allen (1995) argued that there is no distinct difference between phenomenological and hermeneutic phenomenological methods, the hermeneutic approach was appropriate for this study due to the researcher's intent to utilize his own perspective as a second-career teacher to gain meaning from the experiences of others.

The larger population this research will affect is second-career teachers. Laverty (2003) stated that participants in a hermeneutic phenomenological study must have lived the experience that is the focus of the study, must be willing to share their experiences, and should be diverse enough from each other to provide many unique perspectives of their experiences. The most logical and efficient methodology for obtaining the desired representative sample was through a combination of both convenience sampling and quota sampling. Salkind (2012) stated that convenience sampling is a nonprobability sampling procedure where the sample is selected due to convenient accessibility to the researcher. Quota sampling is the nonprobability variety of stratified sampling, where subsets of the population are created so that each subset has common characteristics, such as new teachers who have had a prior professional career (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). Salkind argued that the advantage of this sampling method is that the group of participants will afford some level of representativeness of the characteristics of the larger population of second-career teachers. The disadvantage of this sampling method is the overall degree that the sample truly represents the population as a whole is questionable (Salkind).

The researcher has a network of relationships with teachers and administrators throughout a large region of northeastern Illinois that has been developed through extra-curricular competitions and advanced academic studies at several universities. The researcher utilized this network to provide viable candidates who also led to other participants as a result of knowing others who were also good candidates for this study. Groenewald (2004) referred to this method of finding participants as “snowballing,” (p.9) or using one participant to lead to another potential candidate.

The participants the researcher interviewed included 12 teachers who previously worked in non-teaching professions for a minimum of three years. Leedy and Ormrod (2013) stated that due to the extensive interviewing processes required, typical sample sizes for phenomenological studies range from 5 to 25 participants. A larger sample size would have reduced sampling error, but the time-consuming nature of semi-structured interviews provided a limiting influence. The reason for requiring at least three years of prior professional experience was that with any less time engaged in a prior professional career, the participants would be less likely to have developed the valuable skills and experiences the researcher examined. This purposive sampling method was acceptable and appropriate because the rationale for choosing the participants was explicitly expressed (Leedy & Ormrod).

Data for this study was collected using semi-structured interviews, which were audio recorded and transcribed in order to ensure accuracy. Mapp (2008) stressed the importance of tape recording in phenomenological interviews because the interviewer is likely to miss subtle distinctions in the participants' descriptions if simultaneously handwriting notes during the interviews. Interview questions were developed both from questions used in prior studies on second-career teachers and from the researcher's own experiences as a second-career teacher. These questions were further examined during a short pilot study prior to the main study in order to assess their validity and reliability.

According to Lester (1999), the first stage in phenomenologically analyzing interview transcripts is to read through them in order to get an overview of what is being said. Hycner (1985) stated that further analysis seeks to identify key concepts and issues in the text, which are then grouped and organized according to common themes. This

process required examining every significant word, phrase, and nonverbal communication in the transcript in order to draw out the participants' meanings (Hycner). Lavery (2003) stressed the importance of developing understanding of the phenomena utilizing the hermeneutic circle, whereby the meaning of the individual parts was used to develop the overall meaning of the whole, which in turn then sought to provide deeper understanding of those individual parts.

Once key themes had been identified, Hycner (1985) indicated that the themes must be linked to the research questions in order to focus on only those phenomena that are being explored in the study. In utilizing a hermeneutical phenomenological approach, the researcher continuously relied on his own experiences to provide the context which allowed proper interpretation of the developing themes (Lavery, 2003). These emergent themes were then used to develop a meaningful description of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas further indicated that as the emergent themes developed, individual descriptions were combined into composite descriptions and structural descriptions, which were, in turn, synthesized into the overall meaning and essence of the experiences.

Summary

This hermeneutic phenomenological study explored the common traits that second-career teachers share that may be unique within the field of education, and whether second-career teachers' professional skills and experiences in their previous careers assisted them in their new professions. The study also examined whether second-career teachers perceived that their certification programs helped them to develop their teacher identities and taught them to utilize their prior work experiences. Finally, this

study examined whether second-career teachers perceived that administrators and colleagues placed the same value on the unique abilities that those teachers brought into the classroom, and whether those administrators and colleagues sought out and utilized second-career teachers' unique abilities as a resource within the school system.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The United States is currently facing a shortage of qualified teachers (Harms & Knobloch, 2005; Laming, 2008). Several factors contributing to this shortage are the aging teacher population, the growing student population, and the pressure to reduce classroom sizes. The United States Department of Education's (n.d.) National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) had predicted that between two and three million new teachers would be needed during the 10 year period ending in 2009 and an additional 13% increase was projected for the period ending in 2014. Unfortunately, traditional teacher certification programs catering to undergraduate college students are only graduating 150,000 new teachers annually, resulting in a yearly shortfall of about 150,000. One solution to alleviating the shortage of qualified teachers is recruiting professionals away from other careers and training them to become effective teachers.

That strategy has resulted in the creation of various alternative certification programs catering to the unique needs of second-career teachers. The United States Department of Education (n.d.) reported that by 1994, almost one-half of all public school teacher applicants had experience in a prior profession, and by 1998, nearly one-third of all new teachers had received their training through alternate certification programs. Further, Haggard, Slostad, and Winterton (2006) reported that between one-

third and one-half of all new teachers entered education from a previous profession rather than entering teaching immediately after college. However, Priyadharshini and Robinson-Pant (2003) concluded that while much effort is put into attracting second-career teachers into the profession, much less attention is being paid to establishing environments conducive to keeping those teachers satisfied so they do not leave education soon after they arrive. While some research has been undertaken to study this growing population, much is still unknown about how second-career teachers perceive themselves once they enter their new educational profession and how those perceptions affect their pedagogy.

Though extensive research has been done on the motivation behind second-career teachers' choosing to leave their previous professions, several gaps remain in the data (Chong & Goh, 2007; Crow, Levine & Nager, 1990; Harms & Knobloch, 2005). For example, little data exists describing the unique characteristics of second career teachers, and whether those attributes provide any meaningful advantage once they enter the classroom. Also, further examination of how teacher identity development contributes to teachers' successful transition to the classroom is warranted. Finally, few studies have explored the role that certification programs have in supporting new second-career teachers, and even fewer studies have examined how administrators have supported second-career teachers once they begin teaching.

Theoretical Framework

In exploring how second-career teachers function once they enter the classroom, this research study began by examining two primary psychological and social theories. The first theory is Personal Construct Theory, which originally was developed by Kelly (1955) and stresses that people tend to develop constructs, such as their identity, based on

their interpretations of their observations and experiences in order to make sense of their environments. The second theory examined was Social Identity Theory, which was developed by Tajfel (1974) and is concerned with how a person's identity is influenced by perceived relationships within various social settings. Those two theories provided a framework that guided this research study in examining how second-career teachers perceived the skills and experiences they brought into the classroom from their previous professions, as well as their perceptions of the value that colleagues and administrators placed on those skills and experiences.

Personal Construct Theory

Personal Construct Psychology (PCP), as developed by Kelly (1955), is a cognitive theory of personality derived through a psychotherapy approach in order to assist people in discovering their own constructs, or ways of seeing the world. This practice was later adapted for various applications within organizations, especially decision-making processes and interpretation of others' viewpoints. For example, Donaghue (2003) studied the use of PCP analysis among teachers and found the process aided them in the reflective thinking practice so vital to many educational methodologies. Ultimately, Nicholls (2005) described PCP as a method for understanding lived experiences from the perspective of those living it. Therefore, the PCP methodology can be viewed as complementary to the phenomenological methodology utilized in this research study. Further, McQualter (1985) argued that PCP can provide new teachers with a novel way of seeing themselves as teachers, as well as providing a lens with which others can view how teachers perceive themselves within the education profession.

Kelly (1955) concluded that individuals created understandings of their own personalities, or identities, relative to the sums of their own experiences. Further, those individuals continuously tested the reliability of their assessments by comparing their actions to the perceptions they had about themselves. Ultimately, people tended to observe and interpret what they experienced in order to understand the world around them and their places in it. In a sense, as Nicholls (2005) argued, if one wants to understand a person then one must understand how that person views the world and his or her place in it. Further, if one's actions align with the predicted knowledge about oneself, then one can safely claim an understanding of personal identity; if there is no alignment, modifications must be made either to one's behaviors or to one's perception of identity (Kelly). Sigel (1978) elaborated that when there is conflict between one's construct and one's environment discomfort can occur, which often leads to a decrease in effective functioning.

Buckenham (1998) indicated that as one enters a new workplace, a process of socialization occurs that creates the role one is to assume, a process that is at once standardized and yet personalized. As second-career teachers transition from their previous professions into their classrooms, their socialization impacts how successful they become. Sigel (1978) claimed that teacher education could be viewed as a prime example of how individuals learned to navigate social interactions. For example, Nicholls (2005) described the PCP process as a way for teachers to examine their own personal identities as teachers while still allowing a mechanism for understanding the various inter-relationships between themselves and their colleagues. As the process unfolded, new employees did not need to adopt the beliefs of those they maintained social

relationships with, but they must have, at the very least, understood those persons' beliefs. According to Kelly (1955), PCP is about "interpersonal understandings, not merely a psychology of common undertakings" (p. 95). As socialization of the employees into their new roles progressed, the social group simply assisted the transitions, for it was only through those employees' differentiation from the rest of the group that development of the new roles occurred (Buckenhham).

Social Identity Theory

A social identity, as presented by Tajfel (1974), is the portion of a person's individual concept of self that is generated from a sense of belonging to a particular social group. This theory has been useful in describing the behavior dynamics between members of various groups and is based on perceived differences in group status and the permanence of those differences, as well as the perceived ability to navigate within the group. Bizumic, Reynolds, Turner, Bromhead, and Subasic (2009) explained that the theory emphasized the need to incorporate both their social roles and their social identities in order to understand their overall psychology. Further, Olsen (2012) described social identity theory as a means to connect individuals with the context in which they operated. However, this social identity is not necessarily static and can be altered through interactions within a social group.

Stets and Burke (2000) defined a social group as "a set of individuals who hold a common social identification or view themselves as members of the same social category" (p. 225). As teachers assimilated into the social organizations of their schools, their personal attitudes, values, and beliefs could be challenged and modified (Bizumic et al., 2009). Therefore, social identity does not exist in a vacuum, but is based on

individuals' relationships within their organizations. Hogg and Ridgeway (2003) further described social identity as a series of interconnected networks among various people who have mutually related identities within the group. Additionally, Bizumic et al. argued that social functioning within the entire group also influenced the functioning of the various individuals; therefore, social identity theory was essential to understanding the overall relationships between the individuals and the group as a whole.

Stets and Burke (2000) also reported that when identities were role-based, interaction and negotiation between the individuals and the group were necessary as the individuals performed their defined roles. Further, Olsen (2012) argued that applying social identity theory to teachers and teacher development provided a tool to examine teacher education and practice. Therefore, studying individual teachers and their experiences as they entered the classroom provided valuable information on how they perceived their roles within their educational social groups. Consequently, school systems that supported a connection between school staff and the school as a whole often led to enhanced school outcomes for both staff and students (Bizumic et al., 2009).

Second-Careers in Education

Over the last several decades, an increasing number of mature adults have been leaving established, successful careers in an initial profession in order to enter teaching. Crow et al. (1990) emphasized that nationally there has been a decline in the number of students entering teaching as a first career, as well as deterioration in the quality of those who do choose to enter the classroom immediately after college. Further, concern is growing over an inability to recruit a sufficient number of qualified candidates to teach the next generation of students and the failure to retain those teachers over the long term.

Serotkin (2007) reported that second-career teachers were more likely than first-career teachers to remain in teaching and to have stronger support networks in place when they first entered the profession. The backgrounds of second-career teachers varied considerably, but Chong and Goh (2007) disclosed that most have had extensive prior work experience before entering their respective teacher certification programs. In terms of gender, Cushman (2006) reported that males were far more likely to enter teaching as a second career than were females. Additionally, the large number of retiring and former military personnel entering the teaching profession will have a lasting effect on how second-career teachers alter the education landscape (Feistritzer, 2005).

Several research studies have explored how second-career teachers differ from traditional first-career teachers. Cushman (2006) argued that due to the financial sacrifices and loss of job security associated with career change, second-career teachers were often more motivated to succeed than were first-career teachers. Further, second-career teachers often entered education with additional financial and social responsibilities. For example, older, more mature second-career teachers often supported families adding to their motivation to succeed (Cushman). Several studies have indicated that second-career teachers also exhibited an array of personal and professional practices which made them fundamentally different from younger, less mature, traditionally-trained teachers (Fry & Anderson, 2011; Haggard, et al., 2006; Novak & Knowles, 1992). While both first- and second-career teachers had undergone similar training within their respective certification programs, second-career teachers also benefited from the skills and experiences gained in their previous professions. For example, Jenne (1997) noted that second-career teachers often relied on their own life experiences rather than on

content subject matter or their teacher certification preparation, as the key foundation for their classroom pedagogy.

The differences between first- and second-career teachers were not only apparent to researchers and administrators but also to the teachers themselves. Both Chambers (2002) and Fry and Anderson (2011) suggested that second-career teachers saw themselves as different from first-career teachers in subtle but important ways. Second-career teachers not only felt that they possessed valuable skills from their prior professional careers, but they also made use of those skills in order to provide unique perspectives on learning, such as facilitating real world applications of their students' learned knowledge (Morton et al., 2006; Powers, 2002). While some research had suggested that second-career teachers were more conservative in their willingness to reform educational practice, many second-career teachers felt quite the opposite, positioning themselves as the most influential change-agents in their respective schools (Chambers).

The reasons second-career teachers chose to leave their prior professions and enter education were varied. Chong & Goh (2007) found that due to their prior professional experiences, second-career teachers often reported quite different reasons for entering teaching than did traditional first-career teachers. Researchers have shown that the reasons first-career teachers entered the profession were diverse and interpersonal, including a desire to work with young students, the satisfaction of helping others achieve academic success, and the delight in contributing to society (Chong & Goh; Haggard, et al., 2006). Conversely, studies had also shown that second-career teachers entered the profession in order to satisfy intrinsic motivations such as a desire to express their

creative abilities, a need to accept new challenges and responsibilities, a wish to advance their learning and growth, and a way to give back to the community (Chong & Goh; Laming, 2008; Morton, et al., 2006).

Second-career teachers who chose to leave an established profession to begin teaching described numerous motivational factors for making that decision. Backes and Burns (2008) reported that second-career teachers wanted to be successful in the classroom, and that they entered with high expectations for themselves and for their students. However, if the expectations second-career teachers had did not match the reality they experienced, confidence could decrease and job satisfaction could decline. If this divide between expectation and reality was not reconciled, then over time second-career teachers often began questioning their teaching ability as well as lowering their expectations when it came to their students' potential for learning (Backes & Burns). However, when second-career teachers entered a classroom environment that matched their expectations, and also was compatible with their pre-existing value systems, they were more likely to experience high job satisfaction.

In many cases, the motivations that compelled one to leave a prior profession are independent of, but are nonetheless intertwined with, the motivations for entering the classroom to teach. Berger and D'Ascoli (2012) described this set of motivating factors as the interaction of two processes: the first process provided the motivation to leave their prior professions, while the second process provided the motivation to enter education. While they may represent two independent sets of motivational factors, both combined to provide the impetus for the transition out of the prior profession and into education.

The motivation for change can be quite strong, yet the transition from one profession to another is often complicated and challenging. Crow et al. (1990) reported that second-career teachers relied on the experiences gained in their first careers to navigate classroom obstacles. Additionally, second-career teachers were aided by recognizing shared values among other teachers and students in their new schools. However, while learning to manage the demands of their new professions, some second-career teachers found it beneficial to reject the values of their previous professions as they began transitioning to the value systems of their classroom environments (Crow et al.). Further, rejecting previous value systems did not preclude second-career teachers from recognizing and appreciating certain useful skills such as organization, time management, communication, and stress management.

Besides differences in motivation for entering teaching as a profession, there were other differences between first- and second-career teachers. Crow, et al. (1990) posited that the decision to enter the teaching profession was made thoughtfully and deliberately, in contrast to their other career choices. Often, switching careers occurred when individuals' needs, personalities, and interests conflicted with the experiences found within their current professions (Berger & D'Ascoli, 2012). In the end, the source of the motivation to leave a prior profession for teaching was irrelevant and what mattered most to second-career teachers was the personal fulfillment that accompanied teaching (Backes & Burns, 2008).

While prior professional experiences had proven beneficial to second-career teachers as they entered the classroom, some have questioned whether those experiences were as important to a teacher's success as a thorough understanding of the content

taught. Williams & Forgasz (2009) argued that attributes such as workplace skills, personal qualities, and varied experiences were more beneficial to second-career teachers than the specific content knowledge they possessed. However, McDonald (2007) countered that of all the components that affected a teacher's classroom practice, a thorough and advanced level of content knowledge was the defining factor that determined how successful second-career teachers would be once they begin teaching.

Skills and Experiences

Second-career teachers often entered the classroom with skills and experiences rarely found in traditional, first-career teachers (Williams, 2010). Grier and Johnston (2009) and Mayotte (2003) reported that second-career teachers brought with them professional experiences and people-oriented skills that proved useful when navigating their new classroom environments. Further, second-career teachers tended to be older; therefore, having had more experiences from which to draw, they were often very self-confident in their abilities. Second-career teachers also recounted that they had more success with classroom management, often demonstrating that skill during their student teaching field experiences (Grier & Johnston). Both Chambers (2002) and Morton et al. (2006) attributed second-career teachers' abilities to transfer prior skills easily into the classroom to their maturity and to the variety of previous experiences they encountered.

Several researchers have reported on the skills that second-career teachers brought with them from their prior professional careers. Those skills included efficient time management, effective problem-solving, the ability to multitask, and the ability to cope with adversity (Haggard, et al., 2006; Kember, 2008; McDonald, 2007). However, Eifler and Potthoff (1998) revealed that the skills and experiences of second-career teachers did

not guarantee their success in overcoming certain challenges, such as transforming their knowledge into effective curricula for their students. Further, research suggested that some second-career teachers relied so heavily on the successes of their prior professional experiences that they often resisted attempts to teach them methods that would improve their teaching (Kember). One way second-career teachers could improve their pedagogy was by redirecting the focus of their efforts while enrolled in their teacher certification programs. Kember reported that as second-career teachers transitioned into the classroom, they concentrated less on their own personal capabilities and more on their students' learning progress.

Powell (1996) added that during their student teaching field experiences, second-career teachers' planning and teaching methodologies were influenced more often by their previous professional experiences than by the methods learned in their teacher certification programs. Second-career teachers had often developed a level of organizational skills and analytical thinking that was usually only cultivated over longer periods of time. Those extensive analytical skills allowed second-career teachers to solve problems more easily, and also provided them with the ability to transfer complex knowledge to their students (Chong & Goh, 1997). Novak and Knowles (1992) reported that prior professional experiences of second-career teachers also influenced their beliefs and expectations of their students, which in turn guided their approaches to curriculum development and lesson planning. Further, Jenne (1997) argued that second-career teachers were able to grasp the minute technical attributes that characterized effective teachers, allowing them to achieve classroom success sooner than first-career teachers.

Although there were unique advantages that second-career teachers brought with them into the classroom, some researchers suggested that second-career teachers may have been disadvantaged in certain areas. For example, Bergdoll (2007) noted that administrators described second-career teachers as deficient in understanding the different learning styles of students, a deficiency that could be overcome with proper mentoring and a willingness to expand their knowledge bases. However, the same administrators conceded that the overall skills of second-career teachers made them desirable additions to their schools and that their prior experiences provided valuable connections between the school curricula and the real-world. On the other hand, Morton, et al. (2006) reported that mentors sometimes confused second-career teachers' maturity and experience with classroom expertise, and therefore often expected those teachers to assume some responsibilities before they were truly ready.

Identity Development

In establishing oneself as a teacher, a distinction had to be made as to whether teaching was viewed as a role one adopted or as an identity one assumed. On the one hand, Thomas and Beauchamp (2007) described their study participants as assuming several distinct roles as they entered the teaching profession such as educator, role model, caretaker, problem solver, and supporter. On the other hand, Wilson and Deaney (2010) argued that becoming a teacher required more than simply being assigned to the role of a teacher or attaining the knowledge and skills necessary to perform the functions of a teacher. Instead, becoming a teacher required developing a new sense of self-identity and purpose. In the case of second-career teachers, this became particularly relevant as those teachers must have developed new professional work role identities (Uusimaki, 2011;

Wilson & Deaney). Further, Khapova, Arthur, Wilderom, and Svensson (2007) asserted that employees generally designated themselves as belonging to their overall professions rather than their particular organizations. Therefore, teachers were more likely to relate to the teaching profession than to the specific school or district that employed them.

Flores and Day (2006) defined identity as “an ongoing and dynamic process which entails the making sense and (re)interpretation of one’s own values and experiences” (p. 220). Therefore, if teaching was regarded as an identity, it became necessary to examine how that identity was developed and utilized once the teacher entered the classroom. However, if teaching was instead a role one acquired, then the act of teaching must have been viewed separately from the teacher’s individual persona. Both Bercí (2007) and Jarvis-Selinger et al. (2010) posited that roles were often imposed on a person while identities tended to be developed by the individual within social, cultural, and political contexts. When teachers viewed themselves as playing a role and were then presented with situations that were in conflict with the way they perceived that role, recognizing potential solutions was often challenging. On the other hand, when teaching was viewed as an identity, teachers relied on personal reflection and individual perceptions to develop strategies to overcome obstacles and navigate situations successfully (Bercí).

As second-career teachers began the transition into classrooms, their identities evolved towards their new personas as teachers while still maintaining the characteristics that defined their prior professional identities. Wilson and Deaney (2010) observed that identity formation was a process by which individuals indicated who they were, where they came from, and how they positioned themselves relative to other people. Therefore,

second-career teachers did not abandon their prior professional identities when developing their new identities as teachers (Eick, 2009; Grier & Johnston, 2011). Instead, certain valuable aspects of their prior professional identities, such as their emotional states and their social attachments, were often incorporated into their new teacher identities. However, not every instance of teacher identity development proved beneficial. Vélez-Rendón (2010) reported that when second-career teachers entered their classrooms with very strong personal identities as teachers, they were often unable to develop the additional attributes necessary to realize their potential for success. In relying on their over-identification as teachers, they were unable to reflect properly on their progress thereby limiting their development.

Powell (1996) asserted that the first month of school was the time when the unfamiliar surroundings and the pressures of daily teaching led to the most dramatic changes in a teacher's evolving personal identity. Further, Williams (2010) argued that second-career teachers often struggled when their teaching identities as newcomers to the profession conflicted with their well-established, previous professional identities. Over time, a teacher's complete identity usually consisted of numerous constituent identities that varied within and across social situations (Powell; Wilson & Deaney, 2010). Thus, new teachers remained independent individuals yet still maintained the ability to associate with colleagues without losing the desire to sustain a sense of their individuality (Salifu & Agbenyega, 2013).

While environmental change often provided the impetus for identity modification, Dobrow and Higgins (2005) maintained that identity modification most likely occurred during career transitions. Leaving one profession for another represented a prime

opportunity for new social networks to have meaningful influences on novice teachers' professional identity development. Further, the more varied the social networks influencing the new teachers, the more likely the teachers were to adapt their identities in a manner consistent with successfully assimilating into those environments (Dobrow & Higgins). On the other hand, Taylor and Hallam (2011) alleged that identity modification did not occur until after second-career teachers began teaching. For those teachers, their identities had less influence on their teaching, while instead, their teaching influenced their overall teacher identity development.

Social relationships can also influence identity formation in ways that were beyond the control of the individual. Zembylas (2003) suggested that in addition to emotional and situational influences, identity formation also resulted from power struggles between individuals and those within their spheres of influence. However, social interactions did not always need to result in conflict. As second-career teachers collaborated with colleagues in order to gain knowledge and understanding of their new positions, they slowly became socialized into their new roles (Viczecko & Wright, 2010). This process allowed new teachers to assimilate successfully into their new communities without having to abandon completely their previous knowledge and understanding of themselves as educators.

Developing a teacher identity within a social environment often could be facilitated by emulating another teacher, such as a mentor. Dobrow and Higgins (2005) indicated that one of a mentor's most valuable duties was the refinement of professional identities of new teachers. One role of the mentor was to provide new teachers with a roadmap so they could navigate the obstacles inherent in the unfamiliar surroundings of

the classroom and school environments. However, it was the mutual trust, collaboration, and interdependence between the mentors and the protégés that manifested as powerful instruments for shaping the new teachers' professional identities (Dobrow & Higgins).

Developing an identity as a teacher was a continuous process that often began before the teacher ever stepped into a classroom. Teacher identity developed as teachers reflected on what it meant to be a teacher by exploring their own beliefs and examining their own values in order to become the types of teachers they aspired to be (Flores & Day, 2006; Whitin, 2006; Uusimaki, 2011). This process was not static and continued well after the teacher began teaching. Further, as teachers became more comfortable identifying as teachers, their identities became less of an abstract label and more of a tool that could be used in the classroom. Flores and Day reasoned that teachers could develop their identities to a point where they could use their identities to assess themselves in relation to others, and to appraise the contexts in which they operated. Therefore, a well-developed sense of teacher identity contributes to a teacher's overall level of commitment, creates a higher degree of motivation, and increases job satisfaction. Further, the stronger the sense of identity new teachers possessed, the stronger they felt their levels of confidence would carry them through any adversities they might face (Jarvis-Selinger et al., 2010).

One vital aspect of identity formation was the development of the social skills necessary to navigate the new educational environments. Grier & Johnston (2009) argued that in order for teachers to become participating members of their educational communities, they must have been able to convey meaning and make concrete the community's ideas. In assuming the characteristics of the educational communities in

which they practice, second-career teachers must also retain some of their own features so as not to lose their identities entirely. Viczeko and Wright (2010) elaborated that while identities were fashioned by belonging to a particular community with particular characteristics, a teacher's unique personal identity was maintained, as well.

Grier and Johnston (2009) reported that as teachers worked through their certification programs, their individual identities evolved in response to both their certification programs and student teaching communities. Eick (2009) countered that second-career teachers often entered their certification programs with their teacher identities already formed, but they could also have benefitted from learning how to reflect on those identities to strengthen them and to facilitate classroom planning. Further, Wilcox and Samaras (2009) noted that second-career teachers often struggled to find balance between their expectations about their certification programs and the realities they found once they entered those programs. However, learning to reflect on how teacher identity relates to those expectations allowed second-career teachers to modify their expectations to match their experiences more closely. This teaching of reflection could also have alleviated some of the conflict that occurred when initial expectations of what teaching entails did not match the realities of the classroom (Wilcox & Samaras).

Teacher Education Programs

With few exceptions, most teachers, whether entering the profession as a first- or second-career, must first enroll in an accredited teacher certification program. In 1984, New Jersey was the first state to create an alternative certification program aimed at second-career teachers (Feistritz, 2005). Since then, all states and the District of Columbia have established similar programs. While only 295 teachers entered the

workforce through an alternate certification program in 1986, that number grew to 35,000 by 2004; to date, over 250,000 teachers have entered education through those programs (Feistritzer). At issue is whether those certification programs recognize and support the unique attributes of second-career teachers. Brindley and Parker (2010) and Castro and Bauml (2009) both reported that very limited research has been done on the experiences of second-career teachers while enrolled in certification programs even though that population represents a distinct segment of the teaching population. However, Jorissen (2002) did reveal that the better prepared second-career teachers felt when they first entered the classroom, the more likely they were to continue their teaching career. Therefore, certification programs that recognize the needs of second-career teachers can provide the support necessary to ensure that those teachers remain in the profession.

Serotkin (2007) asserted that due to the increasing number of people who choose to leave their previous careers in order to enter the teaching profession, graduate schools of education expanded their certification programs to address the rising interest of teaching as a second career. The spectrum of certification programs available to second-career teachers varied from accelerated programs that place teachers in classrooms after a relatively short period of training, to programs run through school districts and technical colleges, to accredited, university-based graduate programs (Suell, & Piotrowski, 2007; Tissington, & Grow, 2007). However, Brindley and Parker (2010) argued that the wide range of certification options made it difficult to establish the effectiveness of those programs in servicing the needs of second-career teachers. Further, Cushman (2006) claimed that teacher education programs typically were established to meet the needs of

young students embarking on a first career in teaching, and often were unaware of the unique needs of mature, second-career teachers.

In turn, the expansion and marketing of those certification programs have increased their exposure resulting in an even greater influx of second-career teachers. The United States Department of Education (n.d.) reported that second-career teachers currently represent more than half of the teachers enrolled in certification programs. Further, effectively recruiting qualified candidates to leave their first career in order to begin teaching required a thorough understanding of the motivations necessary to initiate and facilitate that transition (Castro & Bauml, 2009; Williams & Forgasz, 2009). Finally, it was vital that the administrators directing those certification programs understood the unique characteristics of the second-career teachers entering their programs so they could properly educate and prepare them for entry into the teaching profession (Bohning, Hale, & Chowning, 1999; Greenwood, 2003; McDonald, 2007).

The inherent differences in attributes and experiences of first- and second-career teachers naturally led to differences in how they approached learning within their teacher certification programs. For example, Powers (2002) argued that second-career teachers were often inflexible in their approach to solving problems, often leading to conflict with administrators or an inability to overcome obstacles. Further, Grier and Johnston (2011) specified that many second-career teachers felt their prior experiences were sufficient to provide them with the skills to succeed in the classroom without any further instruction on pedagogy. Finally, Rosenberg et al. (2007) concluded that in addition to their prior professional experiences, second-career teachers often entered their certification programs having already completed an undergraduate degree, making it possible to

streamline their teacher education. Therefore, certification programs must address those issues and develop processes that will develop greater flexibility in second-career teachers so they can better assimilate into their new environments.

Prior professional experiences often provided second-career teachers with certain advantages as they entered the classroom. However, Chong and Goh (2007) argued that while the skills, experiences, and knowledge obtained while working in a previous profession could be quite beneficial, they did not always guarantee a smooth transition into the classroom. For example, researching the differences between first- and second-career teachers' experiences in their respective certification programs, Darling-Hammond, Chung, and Frelow (2002) reported that second-career teachers who enrolled in alternative certification programs were less effective in differentiating curricula than were traditionally trained teachers. Further, Fry and Anderson (2011) concluded that while second-career teachers possessed a high level of maturity and prior professional experiences, they nonetheless required guidance in learning how to apply those valuable skills in the classroom. Finally, Grier and Johnston (2011) affirmed that while second-career teachers had unique needs, they also had much to offer first-career teachers through mutual interactions, and therefore, should not have been completely separated from first-career teachers while in their certification programs.

However, Haggard, et al. (2006) argued that program administrators often assumed incorrectly that because second-career teachers generally were more mature and experienced, they would not require the same mentoring and support as would first-career teachers. Further, Mayotte (2003) indicated that while second-career teachers often possessed high levels of maturity and extensive skill sets, they often did not recognize

those valuable attributes within themselves making the transition to the classroom more challenging. Therefore, in order to ensure success as they transitioned into careers in education, second-career teachers needed appropriate support in making connections between the skills and experiences gained in their prior professions and the challenges they would face upon entering their classrooms (Chambers, 2002; Williams, 2010).

In spite of the evidence that the number of second-career teachers entering teacher certification programs was increasing, Uusimaki (2011) and Mayotte (2003) discovered that those students were underserved by the teacher certification programs available at the time. While most second-career teachers possessed attributes that had the potential to make them excellent teachers, that potential was often ignored by their certification programs resulting in teachers who were less effective than they could have been. In researching second-career teachers while they were enrolled in their certification programs, Novak and Knowles (1992) found no indication that the professors made any effort to recognize or exploit that population's prior skills or experiences. Further, Brindley and Parker (2010) indicated that recognizing the particular beliefs of second-career teachers would provide certification program professors and administrators with powerful tools for guiding their professional development.

In developing a teaching methodology, many teachers relied on the memory of how they, themselves, were taught. However, Greenwood (2003) examined second-career teachers to determine if their prior professional experiences influenced their teaching styles in addition to the models they relied on from their own teachers. Greenwood found that second-career teachers entered their certification programs with a set of beliefs about what it meant to be a teacher, which then influenced the manner in

which their coursework informed their teaching processes. However, that coursework could not remain fixed regardless of the particular students enrolled in those courses. Instead, the curriculum within the certification programs needed to be tailored to take into account the individual experiences of second-career teachers to address fully any preconceived notions about teaching that may have hindered their effectiveness (Greenwood).

While personal reflection was often utilized as teachers learned how to teach, that methodology could also have been used to reflect on how prior experiences could help overcome challenges in the classroom. Novak and Knowles (1992) argued that teacher education programs could provide a fertile testing ground for programming that explored how teachers viewed their prior experiences and could provide opportunities to learn how to utilize those experiences. One argument against increasing this type of programming was that it would require a reduction of time and effort spent delivering content area knowledge. However, Novak and Knowles acknowledged that by providing more emphasis on developing meaning from their prior experiences and by making connections between their previous professional skills and their educational responsibilities, second-career teachers would be more apt to present content knowledge in more meaningful ways to their students. Therefore, teacher certification programs that cater to second-career teachers must cultivate awareness of those teachers' unique attributes and must develop methods to support that population (Uusimaki, 2011).

The way in which teacher certification programs prepared both traditional teachers and second-career teachers varied widely. Flores and Day (2006) indicated that teacher education programs appeared to have very little influence on how new teachers

approached teaching, as well as how they viewed themselves as teachers. One explanation was the abundance of research demonstrating the gap between education theory and classroom practice. While teachers did require a certain level of technical skill in order to teach effectively, Bercí (2007) claimed that teacher education programs were more concerned with promoting the technical application of pedagogy while providing little developmental support for “personal continuity, personal meaning, and consciousness development” (p. 64).

Williams (2010) argued that teacher certification programs often treated traditional teachers and second-career teachers in the same manner, without any acknowledgement of their inherent differences. For example, Grier and Johnston (2009) claimed that as second-career teachers entered their certification programs, they needed to be supported as they transitioned back to writing papers and reflecting on their progress. Writing papers and reflecting on teaching were skills that traditional, first-career teachers routinely used but they represented skills that second-career teachers had not utilized since their undergraduate programs. Further, Serotkin (2007) found that as second-career teachers entered their certification programs, they often were more focused on the practical applications of the knowledge they received, rather than the content knowledge itself. This population was also found to be less tolerant of administrative processes and expected additional support in transitioning to the educational culture of their new schools.

On the other hand, Mayotte (2003) acknowledged that many certification programs did not recognize second-career teachers as educational novices due to their mature ages and prior experiences, and often provided less support than would have

otherwise been offered. This often led to second-career teachers entering the classroom with less training than was warranted. Further, mentoring teachers often provided weak support during student teaching field experiences because they assumed that the student teachers' prior experiences would have allowed them to succeed without any further assistance (Mayotte). While both first- and second-career student teachers required support as they first entered the classroom, the type of support necessary for both varied and should have been differentiated. Further, in order to meet the unique needs of second-career teachers, certification programs must allow a certain level of self-directed learning, they must recognize and accept the value of their past professional experiences, and they must successfully integrate those experiences into the curriculum. (Haggard, et al., 2006).

As their research participants began their student teaching field experiences, Crow et al. (1990) observed that two distinct challenges emerged. First, having achieved significant success in their prior professions, those second-career teachers struggled with accepting the more novice roles they now assumed. Second, many of the second-career teachers described feelings of isolation as they left the camaraderie found in their prior workplaces and entered a new environment full of virtual strangers. Those second-career teachers often became uneasy in their neophyte roles which they mistook for feelings of incompetence (Crow et al.; Laming, 2008; Williams, 2010). However, Crow et al. also argued that when those teachers were able to connect their past experiences to their new educational environments, they were more likely to cope successfully with their new novice roles; however, those who were unable to find continuity between their previous careers and their careers in education were less successful in navigating their new environments. Therefore, certification programs must assist second-career teachers in

recognizing the skills that are relevant to teaching and support those teachers in applying their past experiences to their new school environments (Crow et al.; Haggard, et al., 2006).

While many second-career teachers demonstrated confidence in their abilities as teachers, many found it difficult to navigate the new school cultures they faced. LaRocco and Bruns (2006) recounted that while several second-career teachers they examined experienced no difficulty working within the confines of the politics and cultures of their previous work environments, they could not duplicate that ability once they entered their new school environments. Similarly, Jorissen (2002) indicated that certification programs must continue to develop second-career teachers within a professional culture so they can continue to utilize their professional skills in meaningful ways.

Several researchers concluded that most teacher certification programs, especially alternate certification programs for second-career teachers, did little to recognize the importance of identity development for new teachers, nor were any serious efforts made to support teachers as they developed those identities. For example, Jarvis-Selinger et al. (2010) observed that even though most new teachers were strongly committed to becoming teachers, many reported that they had not yet formed identities as teachers. More strikingly, while those teachers expected their teacher education programs to assist them regarding how to recognize themselves as teachers, few programs made any effort to do so. In cases where new teachers had not yet developed strong teaching identities, teacher certification programs had the capacity to facilitate their identity evolution. Therefore, teacher certification programs need to recognize the variations in how new teachers identify themselves, they must understand how teachers' sense of professional

identity affects their commitment to teaching, and they must be responsive to assisting those teachers in developing their individual teaching identities, (Jarvis-Selinger et al.; Thomas & Beauchamp, 2007).

In addition to providing support for new teachers as they develop their identities as teachers while enrolled in their certification programs, further consideration must be made to assist new teachers in maintaining those identities within the new social networks they encounter once they begin teaching (Thomas & Beauchamp, 2007). Flores and Day (2006) argued that teacher certification programs must focus on how teachers develop their identities by exploring the links between the teachers' personal biographies, their peer support within their new schools, and their level of support for continuing professional development within their school environments. In other words, the focus of certification programs should not be solely the application of content knowledge, but should also include teacher identity development and coping skills related to their entry into the profession (Greenwood, 2003). Further, as Grier and Johnston (2009) claimed, it was also important for second-career teachers to establish meaningful relationships with their new colleagues as they provided awareness on how to negotiate their new work environments and their identities as teachers. However, Etherington (2011) commented that second-career teachers often found their teacher certification program instructors lacking in support, especially when presented with older, career-experienced individuals whom they expected to act as if their teacher identities were already in place.

Attrition

While much research has been conducted on how and why second-career teachers chose to leave their prior professions and how they managed the transition to the

classroom, those studies did not always address why so many second-career teachers then abandoned teaching and returned to their previous careers. Ingersoll (2002) reported that nationwide, 14% of all teachers leave the profession during their first year in the classroom while 40% do not survive past their fourth year of teaching. While conventional wisdom indicates that attrition is a problem that cuts across wide socioeconomic and geographic areas, analysis by DeAngelis and Presley (2011) found that attrition was more likely a problem that originated within individual schools. Further, school administrators must understand the factors that lead to attrition so that those policies that promote retention can be implemented on the school or the district level. Consequently, Watkins (2005) argued that the primary role of limiting attrition and retaining well-qualified teachers must fall on the schools' principals, who must fully understand how to create working environments conducive to teacher satisfaction.

While many studies have focused on ways to increase the supply of qualified teachers, more effort must be made to retain the teachers who have already entered the profession (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Fry & Anderson, 2011; Jorissen, 2002). Further, in seeking ways to minimize new teacher attrition, examining the various factors that contribute to teachers' likelihood of remaining in the profession becomes vital to their retention. For example, Harms and Knobloch (2005) presented findings indicating that teachers who reported a positive teaching experience their first year were more likely to remain in the profession. Often, teachers report a positive initial teaching experience when they feel they have entered a constructive work environment.

Numerous studies concluded that several factors contribute to creating a positive working environment. For example, Hedrick (2005) reported that positive relationships

with colleagues and administrators, constructive working conditions, and shared decision-making all contributed to retaining second-career teachers. This corroborates Borman and Dowling's (2008) findings that attrition tended to occur within the first few years of teaching, before teachers have accumulated large amounts of knowledge and experiences that are not transferable to other professions. Additionally, continuous recruitment of teachers to counter those lost to attrition can be quite costly to school districts. Therefore, identifying early which teachers are most likely to leave the profession, and their reasons for doing so, could save the more than \$2 billion dollars lost annually to replacing teachers who leave education (Borman & Dowling).

The reasons second-career teachers choose to leave the classroom and return to their previous careers vary. Some teachers made the physical transition to teaching but found that their experiences did not match their expectations. For example, Gilbert (2011) argued that frustration often resulted when expectations and goals developed in certification programs did not match the eventual school culture. Further, Williams (2010) stressed that some second-career teachers were discouraged to find their prior experiences were not recognized or supported by colleagues and administrators. On the other hand, Fry and Anderson (2011) concluded that second-career teachers who attempted to use their prior skills and knowledge to promote reform within their schools often met resistance from colleagues who felt that, as new teachers, they should not have been so eager to disrupt the status quo. Still other second-career teachers believed that they were not given appropriate support, perhaps due to their colleagues' and administrators' perceptions that their maturity and experiences precluded their need for any assistance (Laming, 2008).

In choosing to leave one profession to become a teacher, people often have a set of expectations about what the teaching profession will entail, with many beginning to develop their teacher identities before they even enter their classrooms. Flores and Day (2006) observed that the identities of the second-career teachers they studied were established early on in their teaching careers but were often disrupted by conflicts between initial expectations and actual experiences. Over time, as the teaching process diverged further from the expectations second-career teachers had about what it meant to be a teacher, frustration and continuous disappointment led to unhappiness and dissatisfaction with the profession. Consequently, the meanings, values, images, and ideals that defined them as teachers were weakened or diminished resulting in a decrease in their creativity and an increase in routine patterns of behavior (Flores & Day).

Zembylas (2003) argued that when teachers' identities did not conform to the pressures put on them by colleagues and administrators to fit in with the school culture, or when teachers failed to adhere to teaching practices that were deemed acceptable, feelings of powerlessness and shame resulted often leading to breakdowns of the teachers' identities. New teachers were often guided into assuming specific teaching practices and encouraged to act in acceptable professional manners. However, while the aim of that pressure might have been to discipline a particular teacher's pedagogy, the unintended result was often a disintegration of that teacher's emotional state (Zembylas). Therefore, Watkins (2005) declared that principals must nurture new teachers and encourage them to develop their own identities, as well as ensuring those identities are in accord with school cultures.

Attrition rates often correlate with the amount of ongoing support new teachers received once they entered the classroom. For example, DeAngelis and Presley (2011) found that the level of administrative support directly influenced whether teachers survived the first few years of teaching and therefore chose to remain in the profession. Studies have also shown that the value of a support system often varied based on who was providing the support. Second-career teachers, in particular, depended on positive relationships with their principals. For example, Jorissen (2002) argued that second-career teachers felt they were best supported when their principals took a lead role in ensuring that support. Additionally, Mayotte (2003) suggested that whether or not second-career teachers believed they were adequately supported varied based on the relative age of that teacher. Younger teachers generally felt better supported than did older teachers and the way those teachers were perceived, based on their ages, had advantages and disadvantages. For example, older, mature teachers were afforded more respect and autonomy but often were less likely to receive the support they required.

Laming (2008) posited that in order to recruit and retain qualified, mature, second-career teachers, schools will have to modify some of their procedures in order to support their needs properly. However, older student teachers often struggled when paired with much younger mentoring teachers. Differences in ages between second-career student teachers and their mentoring teachers often led to difficulties in their abilities to develop meaningful and effective relationships (Mayotte, 2003). On the other hand, Viczko and Wright (2010) argued that when new teachers and more experienced teachers collaborated, the tension between the second-career teachers' prior experiences

and the veteran teachers' classroom experiences diminished, allowing a mutual respect for their respective proficiencies.

Some second-career teachers reported feeling marginalized because their professional skills and previous experiences were not adequately recognized when they began teaching. In both Kember's (2008) and Powers' (2002) studies of second-career teachers, the participants complained that as they began teaching, they were most frustrated by the lack of respect for the value of their previous responsibilities and experiences. While many second-career teachers reported having supervisory or highly collaborative positions in their prior professional careers, many found their experiences in the classroom lacking in those attributes leading to feelings of isolation. For example, Fry and Anderson (2011) emphasized that second-career teachers who gave up positions of authority in their previous careers often felt like they had been demoted, which may have inhibited their assimilation into the school culture. Further, Chong and Goh (2007) and Laming (2008) argued that frustration levels grew when second-career teachers felt that their past experiences and professional skills were not recognized and that their previous professional accomplishments were marginalized.

Those feelings of isolation were perpetuated further when second-career teachers believed support from colleagues and administrators was insufficient. Chong and Goh (2007) revealed that many second-career teachers characterized their administrators unfavorably, especially when they believed the administrators did not provide them with adequate attention. Therefore, those teachers were often forced to take the initiative in order to overcome any obstacles they faced, frequently utilizing their prior professional skills and experiences to do so. Over time, as support waned and resentment grew, the

second-career teachers became more reluctant to approach their supervisors with concerns because of their perception that the administrators did not care about them personally (Chong & Goh). On the other hand, Jorissen (2002) countered that when principals provided adequate initial support for second-career teachers, those teachers often felt more confidence in their abilities and they did not view themselves as novices in the classroom.

As researchers delved further into the reasons second-career teachers left teaching and returned to their previous professions, the most important benefit of that research was the creation of educational environments that were conducive to the retention of that valuable population. Borman and Dowling (2008) asserted that even slight changes to school policies concerning those issues affecting whether teachers remain in the profession can have a great impact on their decisions regarding whether to quit teaching. For example, Crow et al. (1990) argued that encouraging second-career teachers to participate more in school decision-making would bolster their need to feel like essential members of the faculty. Further, Jorissen (2002) reported that second-career teachers who are given the opportunity to participate in professional development are more likely to remain in the profession. Often, positive exchanges and development of relationships with colleagues provided sufficient professional interactions for those teachers to remain in the profession.

Implementing certain policy changes would first require colleagues and administrators to recognize the value in second-career teachers' professional skills and prior experiences. For instance, second-career teachers' maturity and professionalism often allowed them to work with much less oversight than younger, first-career teachers.

Providing teachers more autonomy in the classroom while still offering adequate support when needed also has been shown to lower attrition rates among newer teachers (Borman & Dowling). Further, Powell (1996) indicated that schools must become less dependent on prescribed curricula and begin relying more on the creativity and innovation that second-career teachers can provide. In other words, schools must limit their constraints on how teachers teach, and must instead develop the unique attributes that second-career teachers bring to the classroom.

In the end, the answer to the problem of teacher shortages lies not so much in how to recruit qualified candidates, but instead, on how to hold onto the ones already teaching. Backes and Burns (2008) specified that there is not a lack of qualified teachers to staff today's schools, but there is a failure to retain those qualified teachers. Therefore, administrators must understand what motivates second-career teachers to enter the education profession, what expectations they have entering the classroom, and how to ensure those teachers feel valued and respected in terms of their prior professional skills and experiences. Ultimately, the first step in retaining second-career teachers requires an understanding of their values and recognizing the unique attributes they possess in order to facilitate their recruitment into the profession, their assimilation into their schools, and their identity development as teachers (Backes & Burns).

Conclusions

Over the last several decades, an increasing number of mature adults have been leaving established, successful careers in an initial profession in order to enter teaching. Several studies have demonstrated a distinct difference between the maturity, skills, and experiences of second-career teachers when compared with traditional first-career

teachers (Chambers, 2002; Cushman, 2006; Fry & Anderson, 2011; Haggard et al., 2006; Jenne, 1997; Novak & Knowles, 1992; Williams, 2010). Further, while the motivation leading second-career teachers to choose to leave previous careers to enter education were varied, most second-career teachers reported relying on their prior skills and experiences, as well as on their maturity, to overcome the challenges they faced (Berger & D'Ascoli, 2012; Crow et al., 1990; Williams & Forgasz, 2009).

Rather than approaching teaching as a role, second-career teachers transitioning from their previous professions into their classrooms were more likely to develop identities as teachers (Bercí, 2007; Dobrow & Higgins, 2005; Eick, 2009; Grier & Johnston, 2011; Powell, 1996; Uusimaki, 2011; Wilson & Deaney 2010). Often, identity formation began while second-career teachers were enrolled in their education certification programs (Eick, 2009; Grier & Johnston, 2009; Wilcox & Samaras, 2009). Further, as second-career teachers collaborated with colleagues, they gained valuable knowledge and understanding of their new positions within their schools thereby slowly becoming socialized into their new identities as teachers (Dobrow & Higgins; Grier & Johnston, 2009; Viczeko & Wright, 2010; Zembylas, 2003).

In order to ensure second-career teachers do not eventually leave the teaching profession, care must be given to prepare them properly for the classroom and to continue meeting their unique needs once they begin teaching. Several studies recognized the need for education certification programs to understand the unique characteristics of second-career teachers in order to ensure they were properly educated and prepared for entry into the teaching profession (Bohning et al., 1999; Brindley & Parker, 2010; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Greenwood, 2003; McDonald, 2007; Rosenberg et al., 2007;

Uusimaki, 2011). Additionally, several studies demonstrated that limiting attrition of new second-career teachers required administrators and colleagues to recognize those teachers' experiences and to establish productive work environments based on positive relationships and constructive working conditions (Chong & Goh, 2007; DeAngelis & Presley, 2011; Gilbert, 2011; Hedrick, 2005; Kember, 2008; Watkins, 2005; Williams, 2010; Zembylas, 2003).

Summary

The ultimate purpose of this research study was to identify any unique characteristics shared by second-career teachers and to examine how administrators of teacher certification programs and of school districts can support those teachers and effectively utilize their unique skills and experiences. Therefore, the following chapter describes the qualitative methodology used in conducting this study and reveals how that methodology was applied in order to answer the four research questions previously presented. Subsequently, in the final chapter, a discussion of the findings, conclusions, and future implications of this investigation are offered.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The researcher conducted this study to identify any unique characteristics shared by second-career teachers. The study also sought to examine whether administrators of teacher certification programs, and of school districts, supported second-career teachers and effectively utilized their unique skills and experiences. While the literature review presented in the previous chapter demonstrated a minimal amount of research on how second-career teachers perceive the value and utilization of their prior skills and experiences, the research presented here provides the opportunity to illustrate that data. Consequently, this chapter describes the qualitative methodology used in conducting this study and reveals how the researcher applied that methodology in order to answer the four research questions previously presented.

Goals of the Study

This hermeneutic phenomenological study explored the common traits that second-career teachers share that may be unique within the field of education, and whether second-career teachers' skills and experiences from their previous careers assisted them in their new profession. The study also examined whether second-career teachers perceived that their certification programs helped them to develop their teacher identities and taught them to utilize their prior work experiences. Finally, this study investigated whether second-career teachers perceived that administrators and colleagues

placed the same value on the distinctive abilities that those teachers brought into the classroom, and whether those administrators and colleagues sought out and utilized those abilities as a resource within the school system.

Research Questions

When conducting research utilizing a qualitative methodology, researchers must first develop a series of research questions in order to guide the design and implementation of that research (Salkind, 2012). Moustakas (1994) reasoned that when conducting phenomenological research, those questions develop from a passionate interest in a particular topic and the desire to learn more about the essential components of that phenomenon. Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) added that research questions should be exploratory rather than explanatory and should, therefore, focus on processes rather than outcomes. Hence, to gain further knowledge of second-career teachers' perceptions of the value of their prior professional experiences and whether administrators and colleagues utilized those skills, the researcher developed the following research questions:

1. What common characteristics do second-career teachers share that may be unique within the field of education?
2. How do second-career teachers perceive that their teacher education programs or alternative certification processes helped them learn to utilize their prior work experiences?
3. How have second-career teachers' maturity levels, skills, and experiences in their previous careers facilitated them in their new education profession?

4. What value do second-career teachers believe administrators and colleagues place on the unique abilities they bring into the educational environment?

Research Design

This hermeneutic phenomenological study focused on the individual experiences of 12 second-career teachers. As Cohen et al. (2000) and van Manen (1990) indicated, researchers utilize phenomenological designs to answer questions of meaning, and they are of greatest benefit when the goal is to understand an experience from the perspective of those who have lived that experience. In other words, phenomenological research is concerned with revealing how people interpret their world. However, Ajjawi and Higgs (2007) cautioned that when participants are asked to describe their experiences, the phenomena cannot retain their “essential and embedded features” (p. 614) if condensed or measured through a quantitative approach.

As the literature review in Chapter II indicated, while there has been extensive investigation on the reasons second-career teachers choose to leave a prior profession and begin teaching, there has been little research on how second-career teachers describe their experiences once they transition into the classroom. Van Teijlingen and Hundley (2001) reasoned that research on a topic that is relatively uncharted often begins with qualitative data collection and analysis, the results of which can then be utilized to design a subsequent quantitative study. A phenomenological methodology is therefore an advantageous approach to this topic, as this study represents an initial examination of how second-career teachers perceive their own experiences.

Ajjawi and Higgs (2007) described phenomenology as dedicated to interpretive understanding in order to uncover the meanings of participants’ experiences, rather than

attempting to explain or predict their behavior. Each second-career teacher's experience is unique, and therefore, teachers must be given the opportunity to express their feelings and beliefs about their experiences in order to convey properly those experiences in their entirety. Cohen et al. (2000) explained that research studies that examine new topics, or topics that are examined from a fresh perspective, are prime candidates for phenomenological study.

Theoretical Foundation

In order to recognize the value of phenomenology as an appropriate qualitative methodology, it is first useful to examine its history and theoretical foundations. Over the last several decades, phenomenology, as a research methodology, has been developed and utilized as a valuable technique for research conducted in fields such as education, nursing, psychology, and social work (Friesen, Henriksson, & Saevi, 2012). Jurema, Correia-Pimentel, Cordeiro, and Austregesilo Nepomuceno (2006) described phenomenological research as:

unraveling the internal structures of meanings, not to proving or demonstrating. There are no hypotheses that guide the work and which demand support. There are no truths to be confirmed. Phenomenological research begins with lived experience, the concreteness of life, and the unique. This is the essence which is explored. (p. 1)

Phenomenology, therefore, is concerned with describing the experience as it is, rather than with studying the emotions or abstract thoughts that surround that experience.

Phenomenology was first utilized as a qualitative methodology by Husserl (1859-1938), whom Laverty (2003) referred to as the father of phenomenology. Though

Husserl's initial area of interest was mathematics, his interest in philosophy and psychology eventually led his research towards examining the subjective manners in which people describe their experiences. Husserl found fault with attempting to utilize quantitative methodologies taken from the natural sciences and applying them to human matters. He felt that "psychology deals with living subjects who are not simply reacting automatically to external stimuli, but rather are responding to their own perception of what these stimuli mean" (Lavery, p.4).

The main focus of phenomenology is to understand the essence of a phenomenon from the perspective of those experiencing that phenomenon. Consequently, the main goal of this research project was to conduct a preliminary examination of second-career teachers' perceptions as they entered their new teaching profession. In describing pure phenomenology, Giorgi (1997) clarified that the phenomenological methodology incorporates phenomenological reduction, description, and the search for essences. This approach essentially separates the researcher from the participants in order to ensure that any biases that the researcher may have do not interfere with how the participants describe their experiences. Phenomenological reduction generally requires that one avoid all abstraction, theorizing, and generalizations, accomplishing this through the process of bracketing (Giorgi). Bracketing entails suspending one's prejudices and personal biases in order to understand the meanings of experiences as they exist for those describing them (Cohen et al., 2000).

On the other hand, while eliminating researcher bias during qualitative analysis is usually warranted and desired, the researcher's experiences as a member of the group under study created a unique opportunity. Rather than eliminating the researcher from the

process entirely, the researcher decided to utilize a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology in order to capitalize on those shared experiences. Choosing a hermeneutic phenomenological approach enabled the investigation of participants' perceptions of their experiences through interpretation based on the researcher's theoretical and personal understanding. Therefore, the barrier to appreciating fully what the participants have expressed was removed through the more subjective domain of interpretation.

While all phenomenology is descriptive in nature, a subtle difference exists between descriptive, or pure, phenomenology versus interpretive, or hermeneutic, phenomenology. Holroyd (2007) stated that the very meaning of the term "hermeneutics" (p. 2) is of considerable significance in a research study that occupies itself with interpretation. Etymologically, the root of the word hermeneutics can be found in the Greek verb *hermeneuein*, which can mean to interpret or to understand. Therefore, hermeneutics is not utilized in order to develop a procedure for understanding, but instead, seeks to clarify the conditions of that understanding (Holroyd; Moustakas, 1994). Friesen et al. (2012) argued that a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology must exploit the researcher's interpretations through the negotiated relationship between the researcher and the participant. This interpretation is necessary in order to explore the experiences within a context that provides additional meaning (van Manen, 1990).

Friesen et al. (2012) described hermeneutic phenomenology as being "as much a disposition and attitude as it is a distinct method or program for inquiry" (p. 1). In this way, hermeneutic phenomenology becomes a tool that allows one to delve deeper into the description of a participant's experiences in order to extract more subtle nuances pertaining to that experience. Holroyd (2007) explained that the process requires a certain

level of subjective reflectivity, rather than operating as a more objective method of attaining understanding. It is this reflectivity that was the product of the shared experiences between the researcher and the participants. While quantitative analysis generally eschews subjectivity, Levering (2006) advised that from a phenomenological perspective, subjectivity is not so much an obstacle as it is an expected starting point. Additionally, van Manen (1990) proposed requiring a certain level of “intersubjectivity” or a “dialogic relationship” (p. 11) between the researcher and the reader in order to describe the phenomenon accurately. As such, hermeneutic phenomenology patently rejects pure phenomenology’s argument that the true essence of experience can be isolated independently of the researcher’s experiential context (Friesen et al.). It is not possible to understand experiences without concurrently delving into their meanings, and it is not possible to understand meanings without some level of experiential foundation.

Ultimately, one must decide whether hermeneutic phenomenology is the most appropriate methodology in which to gain understanding of a phenomenon. Examining the perceptions of a unique population such as second-career teachers appeared ideal for this approach because their experiences do not follow the usual path that first-career teachers follow to the classroom. Holroyd (2007) argued that hermeneutic phenomenology is particularly useful when individuals undergo any experiences that serve to disrupt the ordinary facets of the more common practice. Inarguably, second-career teachers have chosen a path to the classroom that is neither common nor often unencumbered. Hermeneutic phenomenology focuses on lived experiences, and therefore, bridges the gap between what educational theory says should take place in the classroom and second-career teachers’ actual pedagogy (Friesen et al., 2012).

One consideration when choosing to utilize a phenomenological approach is assessing the validity of that methodology; that is, whether it accurately represents or exemplifies the phenomenon being studied. Assessing the validity of a qualitative instrument is often a subjective process. Hycner (1985) explained that within qualitative analysis, the validation stems from the researchers themselves. In other words, qualitative researchers demonstrate validity through mutual agreement that a particular approach is valid. This can be accomplished when the research findings are examined by a research committee or through a peer review process.

A second consideration lies in the reliability, or reproducibility, of the study. Reliability often increases with larger sample sizes, but Hycner (1985) and Lester (1999) both argued that phenomenological studies can be quite reliable when interviewing even a relatively small number of participants due to the large amount of data that is generated from each interview. Inherent in hermeneutic phenomenological analysis is the interpretation and subjectivity introduced by the researcher's analysis of the data. Therefore, differences among researchers could arguably lead to variations in outcomes. However, Giorgi (1997) reasoned that the issue is not whether other conclusions can be drawn by different researchers, but whether readers, embracing a similar perspective as expressed by this researcher, can also conclude what this researcher concluded, whether or not they agree with it.

Pilot Study

Before undertaking the main study, the researcher conducted a limited pilot study in order to assess the feasibility of the full study, as well as to provide the option of modifying certain facets of the research design. Van Teijlingen and Hundley (2001)

stated that pilot studies can be utilized as both feasibility studies, which can act as trial runs for main studies, or they can be used to test research instruments to gauge their utility in providing useful data. The researcher initially developed interview questions both from questions used in prior studies on second-career teachers and from the researcher's own experiences as a second-career teacher.

The pilot study collected data using semi-structured interviews, which were audio recorded and transcribed in order to ensure accuracy. The researcher interviewed two second-career teachers prior to interviewing the participants from the main study. One participant worked in retail and government for four years before becoming a high school math teacher and one participant enjoyed a three-year career as a business executive before becoming a high school social studies teacher. The results from those interviews allowed the researcher to evaluate the interview questions and the format of the interview process in order to establish that the data collected would be useful in answering the research questions. While the initial interview questions provided useful data, the researcher made minor adjustments in order to improve their utility as a data collection tool. Those adjustments provided clarity in the interview questions so that participants were more likely to provide answers that were focused on the topic, ultimately generating more relevant data.

Although the data from the pilot study was viable, the researcher decided not to include that data in the final analysis. Van Teijlingen and Hundley (2001) argued that including the data was permissible in qualitative, interview-based studies because data collection and analysis is often progressive as the interviewer gains insight from previous interviews. However, as the purpose of the pilot study was to establish the utility of the

research questions and to become familiar with the interview process, the researcher considered the data to be less than optimal and withheld it from the main study.

Population

The larger population this research will affect is second-career teachers. Lavery (2003) specified that participants in a hermeneutic phenomenological study must have three key characteristics. They must have lived the experience that is the focus of the study, they must be willing to reveal their experiences, and they should be diverse enough from each other to provide many unique perspectives of their experiences. Therefore, the researcher took care to select participants who not only would provide that rich variety of experiences but who also would be forthcoming about sharing their experiences. Cohen et al. (2000) explained that successful sampling is achieved by carefully choosing participants who express the desire and willingness to describe experiences they may share with others. In this way, the participants represented a particular perspective, rather than a particular population.

Demographics

The participants of this research study included 12 second-career teachers, each from a different school located in northeastern Illinois. Though the number of participants was relatively small, the researcher nonetheless made an effort to choose a sample that was as diverse as possible. Diversity within a sample can provide a layer of vibrancy to the data and is a valued characteristic of phenomenological research (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). With regard to their current teaching assignments, one participant teaches at the college level, eight teach at the high school level, grades nine through twelve, two teach at the middle school level, grades six through eight, and one teaches at

the elementary school level, grades kindergarten through five. The participants' schools represented several settings: one college, two high schools, and one elementary school were in urban settings; five high schools and two middle schools were in suburban settings; and one high school was in a rural setting. School populations ranged from 500 students to 6,000 students. Seven participants were male and five were female; in terms of the participants' reported ethnicities, eight were Caucasian, two were African American, and two were Hispanic.

Sampling Procedures

The most logical and efficient methodology for obtaining the desired representative sample was through a combination of both convenience sampling and quota sampling. Salkind (2012) indicated that convenience sampling is a nonprobability sampling procedure where the sample is selected due to convenient accessibility to the researcher. Additionally, Leedy and Ormrod (2013) explained that quota sampling is the nonprobability variety of stratified sampling, where subsets of the population are created so that each subset has common characteristics, such as teachers who have had a prior professional career. Smith et al. (2009) described phenomenological samples as purposefully selected, rather than through probability means, so as to offer a more thorough understanding of a specific experience. While Salkind argued that the advantage of this sampling method is that the group of participants should represent the characteristics of the larger population, the disadvantage is that the overall degree that the sample truly represents the population as a whole is questionable.

The researcher has a network of relationships with teachers and administrators throughout a large region of northeastern Illinois that has been developed through extra-

curricular competitions and advanced academic studies at several universities. The researcher utilized this network to provide viable candidates who, in turn, led to other qualified participants for this study. Groenewald (2004) referred to this method of finding participants as “snowballing,” (p. 9) or using one participant to lead to another potential candidate. Further, Smith et al. (2009) described discovering valuable participants through the use of referrals from “various kinds of gatekeepers,” as well as “opportunities” that present participants as a result of one’s own relationships (p. 49).

The participants the researcher interviewed included 12 teachers who previously worked in non-teaching professions for a minimum of three years. Leedy and Ormrod (2013) stated that due to the extensive interviewing processes required, typical sample sizes for phenomenological studies range from 5 to 25 participants. A larger sample size would reduce sampling error, but the time-consuming nature of semi-structured interviews provides a limiting influence. The sample size should be large enough to provide enough similarities and differences between participants, while not so large as to generate an overwhelming amount of data (Smith et al., 2009). Cohen et al. (2000) reasoned that the sample size for a study should be determined based on the “intensity of the contact needed to gather sufficient data regarding a phenomenon or experience” (p. 56). Finally, Ajjawi and Higgs (2007) explained that 12 participants would provide enough data to achieve a level of saturation where no new ideas would surface.

In weighing the limited overall time constraints of this project against the reasonable amount of time required with each participant, a sample size of 12 was determined to provide enough useful data to represent accurately the experiences of second-career teachers. The reason for requiring at least three years of prior professional

experience was that with any less time engaged in a prior professional career, the participants would be less likely to have developed the valuable skills and experiences the researcher seeks to examine. Overall, this purposive sampling method was acceptable and appropriate because the researcher explicitly expressed the rationale for choosing the participants (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013).

Overview of Participants

This hermeneutic phenomenological study examined the perceptions of second-career teachers and the values they placed on the skills and experiences from their prior careers that they utilized once they entered the classroom. Table 1 lists the participants, their previous careers, their current teaching positions, and the time spent in each. This data is offered in order to place the participants' experiences expressed during their interviews within the context of their individual backgrounds. The teachers' real names have been replaced with pseudonyms in order to protect their identities and the identities of any past or current employers.

Table 1

Participants' First and Second Careers

Participant (Pseudonym)	Previous Career	Years in Previous Career	Current Teaching Position	Years Teaching
Aaron	Molecular Biologist	4	H.S. Science	11
Ashley	Banker	7	M.S. English	17
Cassandra	Legal Secretary	21	College Professor	14
George	Retail Manager	4	H.S. Science	5
Jack	Military	10	H.S. Science	3
Jim	Audio Engineer	8	M.S. English	5
John	Engineer	9	H.S. Science	9
Lloyd	Engineer	4	H.S. Math	19
Mark	Researcher	16	H.S. Science	8
Raquel	Restaurant Manager	7	H.S. Spanish	24
Sabrina	Executive Administrator	11	3 rd Grade	12
Sarah	Chemist	5	H.S. Science	11

Note. H.S. = high school; M.S. = middle school

Data Collection

The researcher collected data through semi-structured interviews with 12 second-career teachers. As the study required the use of human participants, the Olivet Nazarene University Institutional Review Board granted approval for the study before the researcher contacted those participants. Subsequently, after being informed of the general scope of the study and their rights as participants, the researcher asked the participants to participate. Before the interviews commenced, the participants provided some general demographic information. Then, with the permission of the participants, the researcher audio-recorded each interview for accuracy. After an initial hand transcription, a separate researcher performed a follow-up review of the transcription in order to ensure accuracy. Mapp (2008) stressed the importance of tape recording in phenomenological interviews because the interviewer is likely to miss subtle distinctions in the participants' descriptions if simultaneously handwriting notes during the interviews. Therefore, the interviews were recorded on two separate digital recording devices, with the second device acting as a backup to the first device in case of a malfunction. The researcher developed the interview questions both from questions used in prior studies on second-career teachers and from the researcher's own experiences as a second-career teacher. A list of the final interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

Twelve second-career teachers voluntarily contributed to the collection of data through the use of semi-structured interviews, which were conversational in nature. The individual interviews, lasting about one hour each, took place during fall and winter, 2013 and were scheduled by mutual agreement between the researcher and the participants. Locations for the interviews included local libraries, coffeehouses, and in two cases, the homes of the participants. In order to ensure the comfort of the participants

and to maximize the collection of useful data, Groenwald (2004) cautioned that the interview settings should be as free as possible from distracting background noises and interruptions.

Research Tool

Collecting data for this research project relied on extensive semi-structured interviews with 12 second-career teachers. When utilizing a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology, the interview process serves very specific purposes. First, Ajjawi and Higgs (2007) explained that interviews are an effective means for exploring and collecting descriptions of lived experiences, allowing participants to reveal their experiences in their own words. Second, in addition to recounting the experience, van Manen (1990) described interviewing as a technique that allows a researcher to develop a conversational relationship with the participant about the deeper meaning of an experience. Finally, interviews can provide data that is rich, detailed, and in-depth. Smith et al. (2009) reasoned that while other data collection methods may be appropriate when conducting phenomenological analysis, interviewing is clearly the best method to elicit reflective personal thoughts and feelings about the stories and experiences the participants describe.

The researcher conducted the interviews utilizing a semi-structured format. Initial questions were deliberately broad and open-ended in order to allow the participants greater freedom in choosing how to describe their experiences. The participants' initial answers then provided the researcher with the opportunity to ask more probing follow-up questions, as required. In this way, according to Smith et al. (2009), the interviewer and the participant effectively participate in a dialogue where follow-up questions can be

adapted based on the participant's particular responses. If unique descriptions of stories or experiences surface, the researcher is free to redirect the conversation so as to delve further into that area of discussion.

Ajjawi and Higgs (2007) argued that a semi-structured interview format generates a wider range of valuable data, and that the overall richness of that data is augmented because it allows participants the freedom to answer questions as they prefer. However, Smith et al. (2009) cautioned that highly structured interviews tend to limit the manner in which participants feel they can respond to the interview questions appropriately. Conversely, a semi-structured format allowed the participants more liberty in providing fuller, more expressive descriptions of their experiences. One further benefit of utilizing a semi-structured interview format was that the standardization of some of the interview questions provided the opportunity to compare data across interviews (Ajjawi & Higgs).

Role of the Researcher

Phenomenological research requires that both the researcher and the participant share in the process of producing viable data. One way to accomplish this goal was to view the interview as a reciprocal activity in that both the researcher and the participant engaged equally in the dialogue (Groenwald, 2004; Smith et al., 2009). By focusing on the shared responsibility between the researcher and the participant, both played an active role in eliciting the meanings within the participants' experiences. Jurema et al. (2006) clarified that while the participants' language is fundamental in describing the essence of their experiences, equally vital is the researcher's ability to listen in such a manner as to uncover the meaning and significance of those descriptions.

As a second-career teacher, the researcher was not only the principal data collector and analyzer but also a member of the group under study. In conducting hermeneutic phenomenological research, Ajjawi and Higgs (2007) argued that being an insider provides several unique advantages. First, it expedited trust and confidence in the relationship between the researcher and the participant, thereby establishing comfortable rapport earlier in the data gathering process. Second, specific jargon was more easily interpreted and understood, allowing for greater access to the participants' experiences without the constant need to ask for clarification. However, this can prove to be a detriment if the researcher unwittingly ascribes erroneous meanings to certain words, behaviors, or experiences not intended by the participants (Ajjawi & Higgs). Nonetheless, the researcher was aware of this potential drawback and preserved what van Manen (1990) referred to as "hermeneutic alertness" (p. 69), which required the researcher to reflect continuously on the authentic meanings of the descriptions of the participants' experiences rather than accepting the interpretations at face value.

Analytical Methods

Interviewing the 12 second-career teachers provided an enormous amount of raw data that needed to be analyzed carefully in order to develop common themes that could be linked to the research questions. The digitally recorded interviews initially were transcribed word-for-word by hand, and then were reviewed by a second researcher in order to ensure the accuracy of the transcriptions. The researcher arranged the transcriptions utilizing a three-column format with the transcribed text in the middle column, the right column set aside for the notes representing the initial analysis of the data, and the left column reserved for the coding data. According to Lester (1999), after

transcription the first stage in phenomenologically analyzing interview transcripts is to read through them several times in order to get an overview of what is being said. Those initial readings allowed the researcher to become familiar with the participants' stories, as well as provided context and established the participants' perspectives with regard to their experiences. Additionally, Hycner (1985) specified that the recordings and the transcriptions must be approached with openness to any meanings that may subsequently emerge. Therefore, notes were made in the right column while analyzing the transcriptions for descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual comments, respectively.

Once the researcher established initial familiarity with the transcripts, the coding process began in order to parse the data into more organized and useful forms. Saldaña (2009) explained that coding begins by applying a name or a label to a section of the transcribed data. This label is known as a code and the researcher indicated it along the left column of the transcriptions across from the text the code described. In qualitative analysis, the code is often a word or short phrase that "symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based data" (Saldaña, p. 3). The actual words and phrases used in the coding process came from both the language provided by the participants in describing their experiences, as well as phrases or metaphors that the researcher developed in order to represent the essence of what the participant was attempting to convey.

Coding required the careful and thorough reading of the transcripts numerous times, which generated a level of familiarity that allowed a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences. Hycner (1985) indicated that the coding process requires examining every significant word, phrase, and nonverbal communication in the transcript

in order to draw out the participants' meanings. Further, the researcher simply did not rely on the literal content of the data, but also took note of the number of times a meaning was mentioned, as well as how it was mentioned. As the coding process unfolded, common themes began to emerge as researcher examined each participant's stories within the context of the others. Once the initial coding concludes, Hycner also specified that further analysis seeks to identify key themes and issues in the text, which are then grouped and organized according to common themes. Therefore, the researcher then grouped together common themes within the coded data based on their similarities. However, Saldaña (2009) cautioned that patterns in the data should not be categorized solely because they are essentially alike. Patterns should also be recognized in cases where two separate streams of data have something in common with each other, even if what they have in common are specific differences.

The researcher's approach to the data required cyclical analysis. Saldaña (2009) argued that complete coding is rarely achieved on the first attempt, and that repeated cycles allow the researcher to benefit from the additional knowledge gained while coding subsequent transcriptions. Laverly (2003) stressed the importance of developing an understanding of the phenomena utilizing the hermeneutic circle, whereby the meaning of the individual parts is used to develop the overall meaning of the whole, which in turn seeks to provide deeper understanding of those individual parts. During that cyclic analysis, common themes developed, which the researcher utilized to seek further meaning from the data. Those meanings ultimately provided unique perspectives and context within those common themes. However, Levering (2006) cautioned that the data analyzed must consist of lived interpretations and not interpretations of interpretations.

In utilizing a hermeneutical phenomenological approach, the researcher continuously relied on personal experiences to guide the process of grouping the data into common themes that provided understanding of the phenomena. Laverly (2003) stated that hermeneutical phenomenological analysis allows the experience of the researcher to provide the context which allows comprehensive interpretation of the developing themes. As the themes found within the individual transcriptions developed, the researcher compared those themes to those found in the other transcriptions in order to identify which themes were common across all of the interviews. Hycner (1985) stated that this process not only allows common themes to emerge, but it is also beneficial in signifying the differences among the participants' experiences.

As the researcher identified key themes, Hycner (1985) indicated that those themes must be linked to the research questions in order to focus on only those phenomena that are being explored in the study. Therefore, the researcher categorized the emergent themes in terms of their correlation to the research questions. With respect to the research questions, the emergent themes produced the framework that provided meaningful descriptions of the participants' experiences. Moustakas (1994) indicated that as the themes develop, the individual descriptions are combined into composite descriptions and structural descriptions, which are synthesized into the overall essence of the experience. The overall essence of the participants' combined experiences thoroughly described the phenomena and ultimately provided answers to the research questions.

Limitations

One limitation of this study concerns extending the findings applied to this research sample to the larger population of second-career teachers. Lester (1999) warned

that in studies utilizing multiple participants, the likelihood that erroneous inferences will be made increases as influences recur with more than one participant. While phenomenological research can be effective in demonstrating the presence of issues and their effects in individual cases, it nonetheless must be more tentative in suggesting their application to the wider population that the research sample is expected to represent. Further, the sample of participants all lived and worked in northeastern Illinois. While the researcher made an effort to diversify the sample with regard to school grade levels and locations, subjects, years taught, and ethnicities, there is no guarantee that this level of diversity matches any larger population of second-career teachers.

The researcher's own experiences provided a level of familiarity in the data that participants provided. The ability to facilitate participants in describing their experiences without becoming involved in their stories can be difficult. The challenge was to allow the participants the freedom to determine the focus of their stories without inadvertently setting the path towards any particular outcome.

While phenomenological studies arrive at conclusions about individual experiences, care must be taken before generalizing those conclusions. In the end, Lester (1999) warned that the construction of general theories from phenomenological analysis needs to be done transparently if it is to be widely accepted. Consequently, acceptance of the findings is contingent on the readers' abilities to see how the researcher has arrived at his interpretations from the data through the analysis and ultimately to those theories.

Summary

The process of collecting and analyzing data for this qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study, while meticulous and time-consuming, nonetheless allowed for

a deep level of engagement in the data. The wealth of data gleaned from the participants provided the researcher the opportunity to develop and describe thoroughly the emergent themes, and additionally provided the means to link those themes to the research questions. Finlay (2009) indicated that all research must remain true to established scientific rigor, so any interpreted meanings that result from the research not only need to be viewed as grounded in the data, but also need to be achieved through a systematic process of unrestricted prescient exploration. Consequently, the following chapter will highlight the fundamental results of the processes described in this chapter, and ultimately will provide a comprehensive description of the phenomena examined in this research study.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The researcher performed this study in order to ascertain whether second-career teachers believed the skills and experiences they brought into the classroom from their previous careers have any value. Secondly, the study examined whether second-career teachers perceived their teacher certification programs and school district administrators recognized, supported, or utilized those skills. As discussed in Chapter II, while there has been exhaustive research into the reasons second-career teachers choose to leave a prior profession, an examination of the literature has shown little research on how second-career teachers value the skills and experiences from their prior careers. This research project provided the opportunity to explore that data. Therefore, this chapter presents the data gathered during the participant interviews, describes that data in terms of several developed themes, and finally, utilizes those themes to answer the research questions driving this study.

This study utilized a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology, an appropriate approach for an initial examination of how second-career teachers perceived their own experiences. Van Teijlingen and Hundley (2001) explained that research on a topic that is relatively unexplored often begins with qualitative data collection and analysis, which can then be utilized to guide a subsequent quantitative study. Ajjawi and Higgs (2007) depicted phenomenology as committed to interpretive understanding in order to reveal

the meanings of participants' experiences, rather than trying to explain or predict their behaviors. As all second-career teachers' experiences are unique, they must be allowed to express their perceptions and beliefs about their experiences to convey them fully.

Research Questions

Conducting research utilizing a qualitative methodology first entails researchers developing a series of research questions as a guide for the design and implementation of that research (Salkind, 2012). Moustakas (1994) argued that phenomenological research questions often arise from an avid interest in a particular topic and the desire to learn more about the essence of that phenomenon. Smith et al. (2009) cautioned that research questions should be exploratory rather than explanatory and should focus on practices rather than consequences. To gain further knowledge of second-career teachers' perceptions of the value of their prior professional experiences and their beliefs about whether their administrators and colleagues also valued those skills, the researcher developed the following research questions:

1. What common characteristics do second-career teachers share that may be unique within the field of education?
2. How do second-career teachers perceive that their teacher education program or alternative certification process helped them learn to utilize their prior work experiences?
3. How have second-career teachers' maturity levels, skills, and experiences in their previous careers facilitated them in their new education profession?
4. What value do second-career teachers believe administrators and colleagues place on the unique abilities they bring into the educational environment?

Findings

This hermeneutic phenomenological study examined the distinctive experiences of 12 second-career teachers. Before presenting the phenomenological data gathered from the participant interviews, the following section provides the researcher's understandings of the participants gleaned from interactions before, during, and after the interviews. As the researcher is also a second-career teacher, it was essential that those understandings provide context for the data collected from the interviews. As described in Chapter III, that context was the foundation of the hermeneutic phenomenological analysis and provided the rationale for choosing that particular methodology.

Analysis of Participants

These brief descriptions illustrate previous careers, current teaching positions, and the researcher's impressions of the participants. Pseudonyms were used to promote anonymity and to encourage the participants to be as forthcoming as possible in describing their experiences.

Aaron. Aaron is a high school science teacher with 11 years of experience in the classroom. After working for four years in the pharmaceutical industry as a molecular biologist, Aaron believed that the instability of the industry put his employment in constant jeopardy. Seeking a more stable work environment, Aaron began training to become a teacher. Since becoming certified, Aaron has taught in two high schools. However, Aaron misses the laboratory environment where he believed he was able to control the outcomes of his efforts. He believes that his efforts can be nullified in the classroom if the students are not working to their potential. That disconnect between

Aaron's efforts and his students' progress has often made him question his decision to change professions, though he does not intend to leave the classroom at this time.

Ashley. Ashley began her first career in banking as a teller and eventually became a personal accounts manager. Never quite feeling secure in her job, Ashley worked full-time, while attending school part-time to fulfill her dream of being a teacher. While Ashley was helping another employee learn how to operate a new computer system, Ashley realized her passion lay in teaching rather than banking. Despite having reservations about beginning a teaching career at what she considered an advanced age, Ashley earned her certification and began her second career as a middle school teacher specializing in English, language arts, and social studies. On most days, Ashley is confident she made the right decision in leaving banking for education, though on some days she is not as sure.

Cassandra. Cassandra is a college professor teaching English and speech classes, a position she has held for 14 years. Cassandra's first career was as a legal secretary where she spent 21 years working for several law firms. While Cassandra enjoyed the work and appreciated the personal growth that accompanied increasing levels of responsibility, she felt trapped. Cassandra believed the lawyers she worked with had opportunities for career advancement that were not available to her. To alleviate her frustration, Cassandra enrolled in college courses, followed by graduate school, where she also worked as a graduate teaching assistant. There, Cassandra discovered her aptitude for teaching and found an opportunity to teach at the college level, where she has since become a respected leader. Cassandra has not regretted her decision to enter education because she believes this is her true calling.

George. George has been a high school science teacher for five years, but he initially worked as a retail manager. During that time, George attended a graduate program to earn certification in secondary education. George's main influence in becoming a teacher was his love of learning and the satisfaction he got sharing that love with others. His part-time teaching positions while in graduate school only reinforced the feeling that he was destined to be in the classroom. Though some negative experiences at his first teaching job made George question his choice to enter education, he has found more success in his current teaching position where his positive influence on his students is its own reward.

Jack. Before entering teaching, Jack enjoyed a successful career as a commander in the United States military. After 10 years in the service, deployments were winding down and he could not see himself working at a desk job. Jack was also about to get married, and he reasoned that it was the most logical time to transition into a new career. He believed that teaching utilized skills that best mirrored his military experiences. Jack also was looking forward to continuing to mentor young people and helping them to develop their character. After his discharge, Jack entered a graduate program to obtain an engineering degree and teaching certificate. He has been a high school science teacher for three years, and he is currently contemplating enrolling in an engineering doctoral program. While he does miss the military, Jack does not regret his decision because he believes that military life is not conducive to a stable family life.

Jim. Jim spent eight years in the radio and television industry as a sound engineer. Though he majored in audio arts as an undergraduate, he also minored in literature. While Jim appreciated the technical work in the audio industry, his true passion lay in books and

reading. Though he had never given teaching any legitimate consideration, it presented Jim the opportunity to pursue his love of literature. Today, having taught middle school English for five years, Jim does not regret his decision to change careers. However, he does regret having to deal with the politics and bureaucracy of education rather than focusing all his efforts on teaching.

John. John has taught high school physics for nine years. He began his first career as an engineer, where he initially worked on test specifications, before moving to a different company where he earned three patents. As far back as college, John has loved math, and he often helped his friends with their math assignments. John said he considered a career in teaching, but wary of the low pay, he chose to utilize his love of math by studying engineering, though he always kept teaching in the back of his mind. After nine years working as an engineer, John was unhappy and decided to follow his original plan by earning his teaching certification. Today, John is content with his decision to change careers. While he misses his prior salary, the personal rewards he receives from sharing his knowledge more than offsets the financial sacrifices.

Lloyd. Lloyd worked as an engineer for an environmental management company and for a construction company before embarking on his teaching career. After that company experienced some personnel changes, Lloyd began questioning his future options. In the end, he realized he was not passionate about engineering, and he remembered that he originally chose his undergraduate college because it also had a respected education program. Lloyd quit his job and enrolled full-time in education courses to earn his teaching certification. Like John, Lloyd's only regret is the financial sacrifices he had to make, though over the past 19 years that consideration has become

less significant. In fact, Lloyd was quite adamant that he truly is happy with his decision to become a high school math teacher.

Mark. Having always loved science, Mark began his first career working in several laboratories at a medical research and manufacturing company. After 16 years, Mark began to see his role shifting away from science and more towards business and administration duties, which did not interest him. Looking to make a career change, he consulted with several family members who were teachers, and they encouraged Mark to teach so he could still follow his passion for science. Ultimately, Mark became a high school science teacher, and after eight years the only aspect of his first career that he misses is the short periods of downtime found between the periods of frantic work. As a teacher, Mark believes he is *always on*, but his students' successes make it worthwhile.

Raquel. Looking back several decades, how she ended up working as a fast food manager for seven years is lost to Raquel. However, feeling over-worked, under-paid, under-appreciated, and dealing with some major upheaval in her personal life, Raquel eventually decided a change was in order. She had always dreamed of being a teacher, but once she entered fast food management, she felt trapped. Raquel finally believed she was strong enough to leave her established career and return to the original career she knew was her destiny. Raquel earned her teaching certification and was hired as a high school Spanish teacher, where she has happily been teaching for 24 years. Raquel's only regret is that she waited so long to become a teacher.

Sabrina. Sabrina's first career began in customer service at several airlines and culminated 11 years later in legal claims for a government agency. While out of work and recovering from an injury, she secured the necessary licensing to open a small daycare

business in her home. Enjoying working with children but unhappy with the constant chaos in her house, Sabrina closed the business and began working as a substitute teacher. Realizing she had a knack for teaching, Sabrina earned her teaching certification and began teaching third grade, where she has remained for 12 years. Though she made it clear she does not regret becoming a teacher, Sabrina sometimes wonders what her life would have been like had she become a nurse, which was her other dream.

Sarah. Sarah's father was a science teacher, but he advised Sarah first to get a degree in science and gain some experience working in industry before teaching. Sarah began working as an analytical chemist, figuring she could always obtain teaching certification later. During that five-year career, Sarah learned about the application of scientific principles, but the work proved lonely, and she often felt isolated. Seeking more social interaction, Sarah returned to school to earn her teaching certification. Sarah began teaching high school science where she has enjoyed success as a teacher and coach for the past 11 years. This path to the classroom has proven valuable to Sarah's teaching career because her academic coursework in the sciences is much deeper than most of her colleagues. Sarah believes her teaching position is more stable than was her industry career where positions were constantly at-risk for elimination. She also relishes the daily variation of experiences she encounters in her classroom, in stark contrast to the perpetual monotony working in the chemistry lab.

Data Analysis and Themes

To gain insight into the phenomena of second-career teachers' experiences as they entered the profession, the participants' stories and descriptions were analyzed to develop emergent themes. Once the interview data was collected and transcribed, analysis began

by coding for descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual comments, respectively. The data was then coded further based on content. The codes were combined into several dozen sub-themes, which in turn, were combined into seven emergent themes. The analysis of these themes ultimately provided answers to the four research questions guiding this study. While each teacher's individual responses did not fit precisely into every theme, through the coding process these seven themes were constantly revealed in the responses of a majority of the participants. It should be noted that some themes overlap two or more of the research questions. The themes that emerged from the data analysis are as follows:

1. Identified as a Second-Career Teacher
2. Benefitted from Prior Skills and Experiences
3. Recognized as Having Prior Skills and Experiences
4. Utilized Prior Skills and Experiences
5. Trusted as a Second-Career Teacher
6. Supported as a Second-Career Teacher
7. Satisfied Becoming a Second-Career Teacher

Identified as a Second-Career Teacher

In describing themselves as second-career teachers, eight participants spoke of engaging in a lifestyle rather than in an occupation. For example, Ashley stated that she likes to “tell people ‘Teaching’s not a job, it’s a lifestyle,’ and ‘It’s who you are. It’s not what you do’” (personal communication, January 14, 2013). There were certain characteristics that the participants described that were recurrent across most of the interviews. The participants believed those characteristics are what shaped their identities as teachers as well as defined the qualities that separated them from first-career teachers.

Professionalism. For 10 of the participants, the defining characteristic that set them apart from first-career teachers was the inherent professionalism they routinely displayed. All 10 of those participants credited their prior careers as the source of that professionalism. George encountered a steep learning curve when he entered teaching, but credits his ability to act professionally for helping him to navigate unfamiliar situations. Jack explained that during his time in the military, professional behavior was required at all times in response to the constant media presence and that professionalism has carried over into his teaching. Mark provided that his previous career “has given me practice in dealing on a professional level with colleagues, with coworkers, with vendors, with people like that. It’s helped me” (personal communication, December 23, 2013). Overall, the participants were in agreement that their professional behavior set them apart from younger, first-career teachers.

Attitude. Seven of the participants described themselves as second-career teachers in terms of their overall attitudes. Raquel explained that prior to her first career, she was quite short-sighted and self-centered because “everything was just pretty much about me” (personal communication, December 7, 2013). However, her experiences in her first career “helped me to mature and think about the big picture” (personal communication, December 7, 2013). Five participants spoke in terms of recognizing what was important and what they should focus on. Lloyd explained that his ability to prioritize continuously lets him know what is important; Ashley referred to her attitude as having her “eye on the prize” (personal communication, January 14, 2013). Further, Sabrina believed her prior experiences allowed her to remain grounded because if she “wasn’t sure of myself as a teacher, at this point, and what I have brought to my students, I would be shaken. But

because I'm confident, I'm not shaken" (personal communication, November 16, 2013). Eleven of the participants described their overall attitudes as providing confidence, integrity, and dedication towards their new responsibilities as teachers.

Perspective. All teachers operate within a constantly changing environment, and it is the ability to adapt to those changes that allows teachers to work effectively. Within his ever-changing environment, Jim credits his success to recognizing the multiple perspectives of those he interacts with, a skill he acquired while working on projects with multiple participants. Lloyd's acceptance of others' perspectives allowed an "understanding that there are plenty of people who think much differently than you, and that was probably something you just have to get a hold of and say, 'okay'" (personal communication, December 3, 2013). Finally, Sarah explained that her teaching perspective is influenced by the assertive behaviors learned in her previous career in industry, providing the impetus to act proactively in order to succeed.

Contrast with first-career teachers. Ten participants illustrated their identities as second-career teachers by contrasting the way in which they viewed first-career teachers who were entering the profession at the same time. Six of the participants indicated they believed first-career teachers entered the classroom too close in age with the students they teach, often leading to difficulties in establishing respect and authority. Lloyd explained further that "when you come out of college you still have a little bit of a college mentality" (personal communication, December 3, 2013). That mentality often led to behaviors that lacked the necessary self-discipline and follow-through required of teachers. Mark contrasted first- and second-career teachers' approaches by stating that "in knowing that if you have a job, you have to see it through. You have to get it done. I see a

lot of younger teachers who take shortcuts or don't necessarily put in the time that's necessary" (personal communication, December 23, 2013). Jim also pointed out that first-career teachers, as a consequence of their young ages, often lack the benefit of various life experiences, or what he described as "life lesson maturity" (personal communication, January 30, 2104). All 10 of those participants related anecdotes that demonstrated ways in which first-career teachers fell short of what the participants deemed acceptable effort or appropriate behaviors.

Benefitted from Prior Skills and Experiences

All the participants provided numerous examples of how their previous skills and experiences benefitted them in the classroom or enabled them to overcome obstacles they may have faced. The participants described utilizing their previous professional skills and experiences to develop relationships, meet challenges, and manage their day-to-day academic and administrative requirements.

Interpersonal skills. Overwhelmingly, all participants described interpersonal skills as being the most beneficial to them as teachers. For instance, George stated that the "skill that I brought in from retail was learning how to really deal with people, which has helped me talk to parents, helped me talk to administrators. You can use a lot of interpersonal skills" (personal communication, November 15, 2013). Similarly, Sabrina considered herself more comfortable interacting with students, parents, and administrators due to her utilization of prior "social skills, social behavior skills. Those all played into the skills that I carried over into the classroom" (personal communication, November 16, 2013). Communication skills were mentioned by 10 of the participants as beneficial. Jim even recalled observing experienced teachers who displayed a:

fear of communicating with parents. They like to talk to the kids, but they all change their message to the parents, almost like they're scared of them. And I think one thing another [second-career] teacher and I always talked about was we were really straight shooters with the parents. We knew how to deal with adults.
(personal communication, January 30, 2014)

Jim explained that his prior experience communicating with business colleagues allowed him to speak comfortably with his students' parents without the anxiety shown by others.

Another interpersonal skill six participants mentioned was the ability to work effectively in teams. Lloyd revealed that not only did his prior professional career allow him to "see how teamwork functioned in the real world," but it also taught him that everyone "filled a role, and how roles are so important" to overall team success (personal communication, December 3, 2013). Sabrina found that her team-building experiences allowed her to facilitate better collaboration and cooperation among her colleagues. Ashley also mentioned collaboration, but she believed that as a result of her previous career, she "sought it out more, because I was so used to it at the bank. We were a team at the bank, so I knew how to network already and get my needs met" (personal communication, January 14, 2014). Aaron relayed that his prior experiences working in teams taught him how to work with other teachers and to delegate effectively to accomplish goals by explaining, "Here's what we need to accomplish. Here's how we're going to do it. Here's what you're going to do, here's what I'm going to do, and let's get it all done" (personal communication, February 2, 2014). Those six participants credited their effectiveness in working in teams to the relationship skills they developed working with a wide variety of colleagues and clients in their previous professional careers.

Leadership skills. Aaron indicated that his prior professional career did not simply provide experience working in teams. Working with other teachers, his previous career also provided the skills he needed “leading teams, [such as the] bio team or physics team. My previous experience helped with that tremendously” (personal communication, February 2, 2014). Sabrina also believed that due to her working relationships in her previous career:

I already had leadership skills, and I thought that, with those leadership skills, they would apply well in a classroom, because that’s one of the things that people told me. Principals told me when I came in as a sub that I was an excellent classroom manager and that I would probably be an excellent teacher. (personal communication, November 16, 2013)

Another characteristic of successful leadership is the ability to motivate followers. Jack’s leadership role as a military officer taught him:

how to get someone to do something that is good for them, but they might not really want to do. Those kinds of skills of just learning how to lead people to do something they might not want to do. (personal communication, November 21, 2013)

Similarly, Mark explained that one of the first challenges he faced as a teacher was how to encourage students who did not turn in homework regularly, but that “knowing how to deal with students who were not motivated” allowed him to overcome that initial obstacle (personal communication, December 23, 2013). The participants’ leadership skills allowed them to move beyond limiting themselves to team-player roles and to move quickly into higher-level leadership roles.

Organization skills. Nine of the participants explained that the organization skills they learned and developed in their previous careers proved useful in handling the extensive and varied workloads they encountered. Raquel appeared grateful that she was able to meet the challenges of teaching stating, “It doesn’t hurt that I was extremely organized in the restaurant business, and I think that helped me be a very organized teacher” (personal communication, December 7, 2013). Similarly, George relayed that his experience in retail “was very demanding. You had to stay very organized. So all that kind of funneled into teaching, so when I came into teaching it wasn’t too much of a problem being organized” (personal communication, November 15, 2013).

Related to organization, six of the participants credited their ability to multitask and to set priorities as useful in accomplishing the large number of administrative tasks they were responsible for completing. Jack stated that “we’re always juggling 47 things at once,” and he credits his success in always utilizing little bits of time to accomplish tasks in between his teaching responsibilities to “that ability to multitask so that you can accomplish multiple things by the end of the day” (personal communication, November 21, 2013). John’s experiences as an engineer required him “to handle multiple projects...so I’m used to juggling multiple things” (personal communication, November 8, 2013). Finally, Ashley explained that “you have to do everything for everyone and understand everything that’s going on at the same time and be able to juggle that. It helped me prepare to be a teacher” (personal communication, January 14, 2013).

Sabrina found that her previous career taught her the importance of prioritizing tasks to accomplish her goals. Specifically, Sabrina initially was challenged by all of the administrative responsibilities placed on her by administrators whom she suspected:

just don't account for time, and there's only so many hours in the day. How do you handle that? You prioritize, and you have a checklist, and that's how I handle it. In my first year, I made sure that everything that my principal asked me for was done. So any administrative work that I had to answer to, that's how I got through my first year. (personal communication, November 16, 2013)

Mark also utilized experiences from his previous career where he "had to manage timelines. I had to make priority decisions. I definitely feel like that has helped in gaining that balance between all the competing priorities as a teacher" (personal communication, December 23, 2013). All participants described their first experiences in the classroom as extremely chaotic and overwhelming, yet all believed that their organization skills and abilities to multitask allowed them to overcome any obstacles they faced.

Real-world application. Ten participants described examples of how their prior experiences allowed them to provide real-world applications for their curricula. For instance, George summed up the benefit of "having worked outside of the education field. You actually know what the real world's about; you don't know just academia" (personal communication, November 15, 2013). Jim's previous career in media required a strong command of the English language, which he described as "huge real-world experience, and that's something I use with my kids all the time. 'Here's a use of English in the real world.' Application" (personal communication, January 30, 2014). Mark and Aaron both cited examples of how they better explained science concepts to their students by demonstrating how those concepts are applied in pharmaceutical laboratories. John found similar success in applying his experiences as an engineer to his physics curriculum because "now that I'm a physics teacher, it's very related. I can bring in

examples. You always get the question ‘When are we gonna see this in real life?’ So, I can give them examples like that” (personal communication, November 8, 2013).

In addition to applying their curricula to the real world, eight participants were able to present themselves as having worked outside of education, which provided them additional respect from their students. Ashley found that her students “think school’s fake. They think it’s not the real world” (personal communication, January 14, 2013). However, using stories from her prior career allowed Ashley to convince her students that how they performed in school would be important after they finished their education. Ashley believed that because students “judge you by your resume,” she is successfully able to convince her students that:

this school is real life. And being able to pull from a different profession and different things that have happened to me, and experiences that I’ve had, I’m able to tell them, ‘This is real life, and here’s why you’re doing this. You’re in school; here is why this will prepare you for any job you have anywhere else. It’s not just fluff time here in school.’ (personal communication, January 14, 2013)

George also found that because students see “that I’ve worked in other fields, they look at me with a little more respect, and say, ‘Ok, well, he just didn’t teach, he did something else before this’” (personal communication, November 15, 2013). Lloyd was also able to use his previous professional experiences to provide his students with information about what they would find after graduation. Because he could “answer any questions about what it’s like out there, I think it was kind of a big benefit” (personal communication, December 3, 2013). While those eight participants related ways in which their previous experiences with content helped them to explain to students its real-world application, 11

of the participants also believed that their prior professional experiences earned them respect among students and colleagues.

Recognized as Having Prior Skills and Experiences

Although 10 of the participants received their teacher certifications in programs that were aimed at second-career teachers, those programs made little effort to differentiate their curricula to take advantage of their unique skills and experiences. Additionally, seven participants expressed frustration that administrators did not recognize or acknowledge the unique skills and experiences they brought to their teaching. Six participants also believed their administrators never assumed to link any of their classroom successes to their prior professional skills.

Ignored. Although 10 participants enrolled in certification programs designed to accommodate second-career teachers, those programs made little effort to differentiate the curricula to take advantage of their unique skills and experiences. For example, Jim stated that his program did not “speak to career changers, and I don’t think there were any different courses or extra information to help with that” (personal communication, January 30, 2104). Similarly, Raquel believed her certification program was:

focused just on state regulations, on theory, and a little bit of practice, but not much. They’re not focused at all in most education programs on real life, or what’s going to happen to you, or what experiences you had. (personal communication, December 7, 2013)

In illustrating whether his certification program recognized his prior experiences, John described his program as “designed for people who already had a bachelor’s degree and were changing careers. So, did they acknowledge or recognize my skills? I don’t

know if I could say that” (personal communication, November 8, 2013). However, Lloyd went a step further and explained that as most of his professors were career educators, they were not trained to recognize or utilize second-career teachers’ prior skills or experiences. Lloyd reasoned that:

most of the teachers used to teach or they’ve been professors of education. I don’t know that there were a lot that were in other worlds. So, I don’t know that they had the background to know what to use to help someone who was coming from that. (personal communication, December 3, 2013)

George’s experiences with district administrators were no different; he believed his prior experiences were not recognized and that overall, he was simply “taken at face value” (personal communication, November 15, 2013). Though Raquel entered education much older than most new teachers in her district, she also believed that administrators did not recognize her prior experiences and “they viewed me pretty much like a first-career teacher anyway, even though I was second-career” (personal communication, December 7, 2013). Finally, Lloyd believed administrators may not have recognized his prior skills or experiences because the administrators never made the connection between his successes and his utilization of those skills and experiences. Lloyd reasoned that “there are people that have come in doing that well without that same background, so I don’t know if anybody would have correlated that” (personal communication, December 3, 2013). While two of the participants recalled a particular administrator recognizing the value of their prior skills and experiences, the other participants were unanimous that, their school districts’ administrators completely ignored the possibility of finding value in their previous professional careers.

No value. Five of the participants believed that their prior skills and experiences were recognized, but little value was placed on those skills. George conceded his certification program acknowledged that he had some skills obtained in his prior profession, but the program “really just trained us on the stuff that we didn’t know, as professionals” (personal communication, November 15, 2013). Mark’s encounters with his certification program were similar, stating “I think they recognized it. I’m not so sure that the program was tailored to take advantage of those previous experiences” (personal communication, December 23, 2013).

Sabrina found similar attitudes among some of her administrators and colleagues, sensing that they “recognized my skill, because I displayed it clearly” (personal communication, November 16, 2013). However, despite feeling her skills were recognized, they ultimately were afforded little value by some administrators who argued the skills “didn’t have anything to do with education” (personal communication, November 16, 2013). Aaron encountered similar attitudes from administrators and colleagues who recognized his prior experiences, but nonetheless only seemed interested in his background in education. Aaron maintained, “I have an undergrad [degree] in bio and four or five years’ experience in the field, yet there was kind of that air of, ‘Well, your master’s degree is only in education’” (personal communication, February 2, 2014). On the other hand, Raquel remembered administrators who recognized her prior professional experience, but they nonetheless:

looked down on the fact that I gave up my dreams for a while, and worked as a lowly restaurant manager. They didn’t see value in it at all, and so, it’s like, ‘What

does that have to do with teaching?’ There wouldn’t have been anything to bring to the table, in their opinion. (personal communication, December 7, 2013)

The participants who believed their previous professional experiences were recognized, yet ignored, expressed a higher level of frustration than those participants who believed administrators simply did not recognize their prior skills in the first place.

Colleagues. In contrast to most of the participants’ administrators, some colleagues did appear to recognize their unique skills and experiences. For example, Sarah conceded that most experienced teachers expected her “to take the lead from them. But I think they, maybe, view you a little bit differently because you’re not first year out of college, and you have a little more maturity and experience” (personal communication, February 2, 2014). Even though Mark was a new teacher, he stated that some colleagues valued his input and that “they solicited my opinion more so than a brand new teacher on a variety of topics” (personal communication, December 23, 2013). Ashley also related specific examples of colleagues who recognized her prior experience utilizing creative technology. While nine of the participants’ experiences with administrators were less than satisfying, five of those recalled certain colleagues who offered limited respect for their previous professional experiences.

Utilized Prior Skills and Experiences

Ten of the participants received their certification in programs that were designed for second-career teachers, yet the participants were in agreement that their programs made little effort to differentiate the curricula to take advantage of their unique skills and experiences. Additionally, all ten described their professors as appearing unaware of their previous skills and experiences, which could explain why they were never given any

instruction on how to utilize those skills. Seven of those participants also recalled feeling frustrated when they tried to make school administrators aware of their prior experiences, as those administrators also made little effort to utilize their skills.

Certification programs. Nine of the participants described their certification programs as making little, if any, effort to utilize any prior skills and experiences the participants may have acquired in their previous professional careers. Jim was succinct in stating “Did the program really speak to career changers? No, I don’t think there were any different courses or extra information to help with that” (personal communication, January 30, 2104). George initially explained that, at the very least, his certification program recognized students’ prior skills, but “they assumed that we knew how to use our skill set that we already had, and soon we could use it in a positive way in the classroom” (personal communication, November 15, 2013). However, George was also clear that recognizing the skills was not sufficient and that “the program could have worked with us a little more on how to take the professionalism that we already had in our first career and then focus it into more specialized teaching” (personal communication, November 15, 2013). Ashley found her certification program focused too much on content and that “the work habits and the life skills could have been integrated more and utilized more” (personal communication, January 14, 2013). Raquel clarified that in order to develop a level of practicality within second-career teachers, certification programs need to focus more on “your experiences, your life experiences, your former work experience” (personal communication, December 7, 2013).

Sarah’s experiences were unusual because she remembered there was a great deal of discussion throughout her certification program about how to utilize prior skills in the

classroom, but only among the students and never with the professor initiating or leading the discussions. Sarah explained that the discussions were:

more beneficial when we had a break time and it was just us talking, without the teacher facilitating it. Sometimes those were a little more beneficial. The teacher stuff is more, ‘Oh, look at this book and let’s talk about pedagogy.’ (personal communication, February 2, 2014)

On the other hand, Sabrina believed that in certain instances, her program did attempt to assist students with utilizing prior skills in the classroom. Sabrina remembered that in one course:

we had some people that were in our program that were coming straight out of accounting, or different fields, and those people were told how to, in so many ways...it wasn’t ignored, in other words. It was brought into our classroom as part of our cohort. (personal communication, November 16, 2013)

Overall, the participants’ recollections of their certification programs centered on policies, procedures, and content, with little acknowledgement or discussion by the professors of professional skills application.

Administrators. The participants had a wide range of experiences with regard to whether their school administrators made any effort to utilize their unique skills and experiences. Cassandra tried to make her skills available to administrators, but she did not “even think they used them, in terms of recognizing them to be useful. I really don’t” (personal communication, December 9, 2013). George noted few positive experiences with his administrators, though a few colleagues considered him to be a resource. He knew that administrators were aware of his prior professional experience:

but the only thing they were focusing on was my teaching, and my teaching only. Colleagues slowly started to learn my work experience over time, but at first they really didn't care. They just wanted to see how I was as a teacher. They wanted to see me as the educator, not me as the person with the prior job that moved into the teaching field. (personal communication, November 15, 2013)

Raquel described her frustration as a new teacher because she believed trying to convince her administrators of the value of her prior skills and experiences was futile, and:

if you're not going to value it, you're going to ignore it, and in fact, you're going to look down on it, then I'm not going to bring it up. And so, I just didn't bring it up because it didn't do any good, even though I do use those skills. (personal communication, December 7, 2013)

Two participants had more positive experiences with some administrators because those administrators had previous familiarity with second-career teachers and valued their experiences. Aaron sensed that of all the administrators he had worked with at two different school districts, only one seemed to place any value on his prior experiences. However, Aaron reasoned the administrator may have been more receptive because that administrator "was a second-career guy, so he understood what was going on through all that process and the extra school and that you had experience to bring in" (personal communication, February 2, 2014). Sabrina was not the first second-career teacher hired by her district, even noting "a surge of us, and the reason why [there was a surge] is because I had a principal at the time that I came in, that recognized and appreciated second career teachers. I felt welcomed" (personal communication, November 16, 2013). The prevailing view among participants was that the more experience administrators had

working with second-career teachers, the more likely they were to utilize their previous skills and experiences.

Trusted as a Second-Career Teacher

All of the participants possessed and displayed valuable skills they believed were ignored by their district administrators. However, the participants were clear that they possessed something that was not really a skill but a trait they displayed that was recognized and utilized. John described the trait as “intangible things, just having the maturity is a huge help” (personal communication, November 8, 2013). While maturity is not a skill learned in a prior profession, second-career teachers are generally older than first-career teachers when they enter the classroom, and those extra years can allow one more time to mature. Raquel opined that the time spent working in her previous career allowed her “a chance to mature” (personal communication, December 7, 2013).

Respect. Jack and Raquel both indicated that they received immediate respect from their students because they appeared older and because of how they conducted themselves. Raquel believed that “if I had come right out of college at 22, and tried to be a high school teacher, I think I was just much too immature, too close to their age, too into their music, their trends, their everything” (personal communication, December 7, 2013). John agreed, explaining “I think the students seeing an older teacher means something to them as well. If they see somebody closer to their age, they’re more likely to take advantage of that” (personal communication, November 8, 2013). Cassandra believed that her maturity provided an advantage over first-career teachers who “did not get the kind of respect as someone coming in with a little bit of background” (personal communication, December 9, 2013).

Overcoming obstacles. In addition to maturity leading to respect from their students, seven participants credited their maturity for allowing them to overcome obstacles. For example, George contended that his maturity “provided tons of benefit. Having worked in a job where you’re constantly stressed, you have a little bit of a different attitude coming into the teaching field” (personal communication, November 15, 2013). Similarly, Sabrina’s maturity allowed her to handle challenges because “to me, the maturity level was that I wasn’t shaken easily? I was more grounded, so I knew this is what I was going to do” (personal communication, November 16, 2013). Jim identified his maturity as providing him with a certain level of confidence when “dealing with parents. When I dealt with clients, when I dealt with other people, you just kind of have the confidence that comes along with it” (personal communication, January 30, 2104). For Sarah, maturity afforded her the capacity to work independently and to “take responsibility for everything. It’s more on me to work on stuff instead of just saying, ‘Oh well, you can’t really do that’” (personal communication, February 2, 2014).

Freedom. Demonstrating a certain level of maturity often allowed participants a measure of trust from administrators providing freedoms usually reserved for more experienced teachers. Sarah disclosed that administrators “view you a bit differently because you’re not first year out of college and you have a little more maturity and experience” (personal communication, February 2, 2014). Lloyd stated administrators:

could trust me right off the bat because of the maturity, because of the experience.

I think they felt I was little bit more mature, being a 26 year old in the profession as opposed to a 22 year old in the profession. (personal communication, December 3, 2013)

John described being mostly left alone by his administrators because “I think they get a good idea early on. I think I had less needs than a first career teacher. I was not a concern for anybody” (personal communication, November 8, 2013).

George believed his age and maturity afforded him more trust from his administrators compared to first-career teachers. “I was older, so they trusted me a little more than they would, say a 22 or 23 year old coming straight out of college into the teaching field” (personal communication, November 15, 2013). Ultimately, trust created relationships between George and his administrators where the “administrators that knew my resume [and therefore] didn’t have such a hands-on control over me as they would for a brand new, fresh-out-of-college, first-year teacher” (personal communication, November 15, 2013). Jack described being offered to teach an advanced placement (AP) course his first year of teaching. He remembered “being given the AP right off the bat. I don’t think there’s a lot of first-year teachers that start off on AP” (personal communication, November 21, 2013). All participants related how their maturity earned them respect, provided them the wherewithal to overcome obstacles, or offered them more freedoms from their administrators.

Supported as a Second-Career Teacher

Eleven participants expressed displeasure with the lack of support they received from their certification programs. While some remembered receiving a modicum of support from their cooperating teachers during their student teaching, most considered the support from their programs as lacking. Once the participants entered teaching full-time, all were involved in new teacher mentoring programs. However, they reported only a

minimal level of support from mentors, and all but one of the participants indicated no differentiation in the mentoring program to support them as second-career teachers.

Preparation. While Lloyd acknowledged that his certification program was designed for second-career teachers, he was adamant when he declared, “I don’t think the program did for me a whole lot, to be honest with you” (personal communication, December 3, 2013). John was just as direct when he stated:

the teacher education [program], I feel was, honestly, jumping through hoops. You learn about the history of education and that, and okay, that’s interesting. I don’t know how that’s going to help me in the classroom. I don’t feel like that program helped me become a teacher, necessarily. It got me the background to be certified, but I didn’t feel like I was really learning how to be a teacher. (personal communication, November 8, 2013)

Jack concurred that his success as a teacher was a result of his time in the Marine Corps because “I don’t think it was the [certification] classes I took” (personal communication, November 21, 2013). Raquel complained that “There was nothing about my [student] teaching experience that prepared me for being a real teacher” (personal communication, December 7, 2013). Raquel often became frustrated when her previous experiences were not taken into account by her certification program administrators or her cooperating teacher while she was student teaching. She believed “there’s so much hand-holding and babying going along through it” (personal communication, December 7, 2013).

Jack did not recall any instances where his certification program made any effort to support his needs as a second-career teacher. However, he did acknowledge that his cooperating teacher recognized his previous experiences in the military:

it was just him saying, ‘No, feel free to do this’, and I would be like, ‘That’s what I would have done if this was the Marine Corps.’ Just having someone say, ‘That’s okay.’ I think [it] just took that experienced teacher saying, ‘No it’s fine. Nope, you can do that,’ and then going, ‘Okay, I can rely on all these skill sets that I’ve built up.’ (personal communication, November 21, 2013)

While six other participants mentioned how beneficial the student teaching portions of their certification programs were compared to the coursework, Jack was the only participant to mention that his cooperating teacher recognized or utilized his prior professional skills during his time as a student teacher.

Of all the participants, only Sabrina believed her certification program, which was designed for alternatively-certified teachers, acknowledged and supported her prior skills and experiences. Sabrina explained that her prior experiences allowed her program to:

cut out a lot of unnecessary things that some traditional programs have. The alternative certification program just cuts right to the most important meat of what we needed to be successful teachers. And I look at a lot of our successful teachers, including myself, and we’re alternatively-certified. So I do think they adequately prepared us. (personal communication, November 16, 2013)

While Sabrina believed she received the support she needed as a second-career teacher, none of the other participants could assert the same about their certification programs.

Mentoring. Nine of the participants reported being involved in new teacher mentoring programs as they first entered the classroom. However, there was little indication that any effort was made to differentiate the process for second-career teachers. For example, Jim lamented that there was no attempt to support any particular

needs he may have had as a second-career teacher, and that administrators “just kind of throw you into the mentor program that they have. So I was just kind of left to fend for myself” (personal communication, January 30, 2013). Mark was more direct in his assessment of his mentoring program when he complained, “I don’t feel like the mentor program is really designed for second-career teachers” (personal communication, December 23, 2013). Mark placed the blame for that lack of support directly on his mentor, whom he said, “did not really provide me very good resources, or really tailor that relationship to take advantage of my previous experience” (personal communication, December 23, 2013).

Ashley recounted disappointment that her mentoring program made no effort to tailor itself to her particular needs and that “administrators need to support and recognize, and I think [mentors] need to allow” for those differences (personal communication, January 14, 2013). Sarah also reported no difference in how her mentoring program treated her unique needs stating, “They gave no different support to me than they did [first-career teachers]. Coming in you had to do all the first teacher, first-year stuff. So, I was not treated any differently than a person right out of college” (personal communication, February 2, 2014). Raquel remembered her mentoring program doing “a very poor job of meeting [second-career] teachers’ needs. There needs to be a lot more mentoring, a lot more support” (personal communication, December 7, 2013).

With regard to her experiences in her mentoring program, once again Sabrina’s experiences were contrary to most of the other participants. She expressed gratitude for her mentoring program, believing her administrators recognized her unique needs when she stated “I think my district is one of those districts that have a support system for new

teachers, but especially teachers that are alternatively-certified” (personal communication, November 16, 2013). While seven of the other participants described their experiences in mentoring programs, none of those participants reported that their mentors made any concessions or adaptations to reflect the participants’ unique needs.

Satisfied Becoming a Second-Career Teacher

All of the participants mentioned fears they had about leaving the familiarity of their previous careers to face unfamiliar challenges during their transition into education. Despite those challenges, 11 of the participants did not regret changing careers. All participants believed teaching was their true calling, and all but one expressed relief and happiness that their dreams were finally realized.

Financial. All of the participants reported financial uncertainty as one of their biggest fears in transitioning into their education career. In spite of those fears, 11 of the participants claimed they did not regret their choices to leave their previous careers and that the reduction in their salaries was more than offset by their personal fulfillment as teachers. John reasoned:

I have not regretted it yet. I could bring up the money, but that’s really not anything to do with it. I’d love to be making more money, the engineering money, but honestly I chose this knowing I’d take a pay cut, and I don’t regret it.

(personal communication, November 8, 2013)

Sabrina clarified that had she “stayed at the attorney general’s office, I probably would’ve made a lot more money than I make now..., but I’ve always yearned to do something to help people learn. So I don’t regret it, I just don’t” (personal communication, November 16, 2013).

Mark sometimes misses the financial rewards of his previous career, but nonetheless considers “my job as a teacher is not as financially rewarding, but it’s more rewarding as a whole for me” (personal communication, December 23, 2013). Lloyd knew that leaving his engineering career was financially risky, but he has never regretted his choice because “in terms of perspective, knowing that I could have probably made more money, but this is more important to me to do this. And being able to say that I love what I do every day” (personal communication, December 3, 2013). Sarah was also concerned about her loss of salary, but she explained that teaching allows her to “work and have a family and have the best of both worlds. So, for me, I feel it’s good” (personal communication, February 2, 2014).

Calling. Eight participants cited examples of how their career changes were respected by others, which often resulted in personal fulfillment. For example, Ashley explained that when others become aware:

that I had a prior career and then I came into teaching, I think that that’s actually looked upon highly. This is a choice that I’ve made in my life. Some of them, they just come out of college or they go into college not knowing what to do, and many people think that teaching is a fallback. And I don’t think that I was looked at that way. (personal communication, January 14, 2014)

For George, the transition into teaching was not easy. He described his first year teaching as “all these hurdles coming at you. So at times you regret it, but what makes you not regret it is the impact you do make, and you realize overall it still is better than what you had before” (personal communication, November 15, 2013).

Eleven of the participants were grateful they eventually found the courage to give up stable, rewarding careers to face the challenges of teaching. Despite those challenges, Raquel has “never questioned my choice. I’ve always felt called to be a teacher, and I feel like it’s just regretful that I almost let that slip away” (personal communication, December 7, 2013). Jack sometimes thinks about where he would be today had he stayed in the Marine Corps, but in the end, “there’s nothing better than coming to work with these kids. I have a blast every day” (personal communication, November 21, 2013).

Of all the participants, Aaron was the only one who expressed regret over his choice to enter teaching. He misses working in the laboratory where “I could work more at my own pace, and the responsibility was all me, and I could affect the outcome” (personal communication, February 2, 2014). For the other participants, the differences they are making in the lives of their students are all the reward they need to know they made the right choices in becoming teachers. As Ashley shared, she asked herself “‘Why am I a banker when [teaching] is what I’ve always wanted to do?’ And that was the day...I said I need to go back to what I wanted” (personal communication, January 14, 2014). For many participants, those rewards are also what keep them in the classroom.

Conclusions

Each of the themes and sub-themes discussed in the findings can be linked to one or more of the research questions. Furthermore, the data presented in the findings provided the evidence necessary to answer the four research questions that have guided this research. The data also indicated how the findings of this study align with other studies on second-career teachers previously discussed.

Research Question One: Common Characteristics of Second-Career Teachers

A majority of the participants shared common characteristics they believed were unique among second-career teachers. Those characteristics were significant in contributing to the participants' overall identities as teachers. This aligned with Kelly's (1955) argument that people tend to develop constructs, such as their identities, based on the way in which they interpret the observations of their experiences to make sense of their environments. Most of the participants described how their previous experiences fostered attitudes of confidence on which they relied in times of stress and uncertainty. Those attitudes also promoted levels of integrity and dedication toward their responsibilities that the participants often found lacking in younger, first-career teachers. Several participants also described how previous experiences allowed them to recognize and respect the others' perspectives, allowing for more productive relationships.

At no time in their education careers did any of the participants believe they operated in anything but a professional manner, a trait they unanimously credited to their previous careers. Professionalism was the defining characteristic the participants believed they continuously displayed, and all regarded their professional behavior as the attribute that most distinguished them from first-career teachers. That display of professionalism supports Eick's (2009) findings that second-career teachers did not abandon their prior professional identities when developing their new identities as teachers. Compared to first-career teachers, the participants credited professionalism, along with their levels of maturity, as earning them more respect from students and administrators. Ultimately, the participants appreciated the additional respect their professionalism and maturity

garnered, providing them with higher levels of confidence as teachers and more positive attitudes toward their classroom experiences.

All the participants mentioned fears they had about leaving the comfort of their previous careers for education's unknown challenges. However, all but one were clear that despite those challenges, they did not regret their decisions. Nearly all the participants mentioned that despite financial uncertainties, and in some cases losses, teaching was the career they were destined to achieve, and the financial drawbacks were more than offset by the satisfaction they realized as teachers. The participants also expressed their happiness since entering what many described as their dream jobs or their true callings. This aligns with Cushman's (2006) research that claimed second-career teachers are more motivated to succeed than first-career teachers due to the financial sacrifices and losses of job security associated with career changes. The participants conveyed that people often show more respect towards them because second-career teachers' choices to enter the profession are deemed more deliberate than first-career teachers who may have entered teaching as a fallback profession. Those feelings offer support to Crow's et al. (1990) contention that second-career teachers' decisions to enter teaching were made thoughtfully and deliberately, often in contrast to how some first-career teachers made their career choices.

Research Question Two: Perceptions of Effectiveness of Teacher Education Programs

Although 10 of the participants received their certification in programs that were aimed at second-career teachers, those programs made little effort to differentiate the curricula to take advantage of their unique skills and experiences. That finding matched Cushman's (2006) claim that teacher education programs typically are established to

meet the needs of young students embarking on first careers in teaching and often are unaware of the unique needs of second-career teachers. In addition to the lack of differentiation in the curricula, the participants described their professors as oblivious to any unique skills and experiences they may have possessed. Therefore, the participants explained that they were never given any instruction on how best to utilize those skills once they began teaching. Those findings match Novak and Knowles' (1992) research indicating that professors in certification programs made little effort to recognize or exploit second-career teachers' prior skills or experiences. Two of the participants reported that their certification programs may have recognized that they had acquired certain skills, but nonetheless placed little value on them. The participants conceded those programs were simply not tailored to take advantage of their unique skills.

As the majority of participants recounted their certification programs as offering little recognition or placing any significant value on their prior professional skills, it should not be surprising that only one participant believed his or her program made an effort to teach his or her how to utilize prior skills. The remaining participants provided numerous anecdotes describing how their certification programs fell short in providing the support they needed. This proved frustrating, considering the unique sets of skills and experiences they perceived would be of value once they began teaching. This finding supported Powell's (1996) conclusion that during student teaching experiences, second-career teachers' planning and teaching methodologies are influenced more often by their previous professional experiences than by the methods learned in their certification programs. Only one participant reported that his or her cooperating teacher made an effort to teach him or her how to utilize prior professional skills.

Research Question Three: Facilitation through Maturity, Skills, and Prior Experiences

All participants provided evidence of the numerous ways in which their previous skills and experiences benefitted them in the classroom or enabled them to overcome obstacles. This finding supported the work of Fry and Anderson (2011) who described second-career teachers as exhibiting an array of personal and professional practices which made them fundamentally different from younger, less mature, traditionally-trained teachers. The skills most often cited by participants as providing the greatest advantage were interpersonal skills, communication skills, team-building skills, and social-behavioral skills. Having well-developed interpersonal skills allowed the participants to develop meaningful relationships with students, colleagues, and administrators, as well as to collaborate effectively with team members. The participants' perceptions of the value of their interpersonal skills aligned with Grier and Johnston (2009) and Mayotte (2003) who posited that second-career teachers possessed people-oriented skills that proved useful when navigating their new classroom environments. Five of the participants' experiences also involved developing authentic leadership skills that provided useful motivation techniques.

The participants described the organizational skills they developed in their previous careers as valuable in managing the wide-ranging and diverse workloads they faced. Many participants' abilities to multitask and prioritize were indispensable in allowing them to accomplish personal goals and complete required tasks on time. Nearly all the participants described instances in which their previous professional experiences provided real-world applications for the content they were teaching. Those experiences with authentic application enabled participants to make the content more genuine for their

students, providing needed context that enhanced learning. Those experiences were consistent with the findings of Morton et al. (2006) and Powers (2002) that second-career teachers not only believed they possessed valuable skills from their prior careers, but they also utilized those skills to provide unique viewpoints on learning.

While maturity is not ordinarily considered a skill, second-career teachers are often older than first-career teachers when they begin teaching, and seven participants attributed their successes in overcoming obstacles to their maturity. For them, maturity represented an intangible skill that nonetheless allowed them to handle stress and remain grounded when challenged. Still other participants credited their maturity with allowing them the confidence to work independently and take responsibility for how they influenced their environments.

Research Question Four: Beliefs about Value Shown by Administrators and Colleagues

Nine participants reported that as they first entered the classroom, they were not treated differently than newly-hired, first-career teachers. The participants displayed frustration that administrators did not recognize or acknowledge the unique skills and experiences they brought to their teaching. Those findings were in line with Sigel's (1978) argument that frustration can occur when there is conflict between one's identity and one's environment, which often leads to a decrease in effective functioning. Participants also believed that when they did demonstrate any success in the classroom, their administrators never linked that success to their prior professional skills. Two of the participants did acknowledge that administrators may have been aware of their previous experiences, but even so, they placed little or no value on those experiences. Seven of

those participants expressed disappointment that most of their previous skills and experiences were discounted as being unrelated to education.

The participants' experiences with administrators were mixed with regard to whether the participants believed administrators utilized their prior skills and experiences as a resource. Ten of the participants recalled frustration when they tried to make administrators aware of their unique experiences or expressed their willingness to share those experiences. That supports the work of Kember (2008) and Powers (2002) who both argued that second-career teachers often felt marginalized when their professional skills and previous experiences were not adequately recognized by administrators. However, two participants remembered more positive experiences with some of their administrators because those administrators had familiarity with second-career teachers.

Nine participants described some involvement in new teacher mentoring programs. However, there was little to suggest that any effort was made to differentiate the mentoring process for second-career teachers. The participants were clear that as second-career teachers, they possessed some unique needs that all but one participant believed were never addressed, and therefore rarely supported. That perception of a lack of support aligns with Dobrow and Higgins' (2005) conclusions that one of the most valuable duties of a mentor is the refinement of professional identity of new teachers. In contrast to the interactions most participants had with administrators, only two participants recalled colleagues who appeared to recognize their unique skills and experiences. Those participants reported a boost to their self-esteem when approached by colleagues as a resource rather than as a novice.

By demonstrating more maturity, administrators often allowed the participants a degree of trust usually retained for more experienced teachers. The participants were in agreement that freedoms afforded them by some administrators often resulted in more autonomy, which reduced stress levels and reinforced participants' identities as trusted and valued educators. However, five participants believed the freedoms they enjoyed may have resulted in less overall support than they truly desired. That supports Haggard's et al. (2006) argument that administrators sometimes assumed incorrectly that because second-career teachers generally were more mature and experienced, they would not require mentoring and support as would first-career teachers.

Implications and Recommendations

Those contemplating a second career in teaching must consider several factors before beginning their transition. Potential second-career teachers first should reflect on their professional skills and experiences to assess their value and to consider how they can be utilized in their classrooms. As they search for certification programs, potential second-career teachers should seek programs that recognize and support their unique needs. Finally, second-career teachers should promote their prior professional skills and experiences as resources for administrators and colleagues. Following is a discussion of the implications of the findings of this study, as well as recommendations for second-career teachers, for administrators of certification programs and school districts, and for researchers planning further study on this topic.

Prospective Second-Career Teachers

Based on the experiences of the second-career teachers interviewed for this study, it is never too late to follow one's dream of becoming a teacher. The satisfaction the

participants expressed concerning their choices to change careers was nothing short of remarkable. Despite numerous obstacles, both expected and unforeseen, the participants provided evidence for others considering a career change that personal and professional fulfillment is attainable. Prospective second-career teachers can rely on the evidence presented in this study to support the proposition that they possess unique skills and experiences that can facilitate their transition into the classroom.

When assessing the likelihood of successfully transitioning to teaching, candidates should reflect on the skills and experiences presented here that can be assets in the classroom. Further, second-career teachers should not hesitate to make their previous professional skills and experiences known to their certification professors and district administrators. As demonstrated in this study and supported in studies by Haggard et al. (2006) and Novak and Knowles (1992), second-career teachers possess unique skills and experiences that can contribute to overcoming challenges and can enhance student learning. Therefore, second-career teachers should utilize their prior professional skills and experiences to navigate their new educational environments. Second-career teachers should also take every opportunity to promote themselves as unique assets and valuable resources to students, administrators, and colleagues.

Teacher Certification Programs

The experiences of the participants interviewed for this study point to a deficiency in how teacher certification programs support the needs of second-career teachers. While 10 of the participants reported that their certification programs were designed for career changers, the participants did not recall any evidence that the programs recognized or utilized their unique skills and experiences. The participants indicated they had hoped

their programs and professors would have acknowledged their skills and would have taught them how to utilize those skills in the classroom. To lessen the frustrations of career changers as they study to become teachers, certification programs would benefit from modifying their curricula to develop the skills and experiences of those students, so they can learn to apply their skills in the classroom. That corresponds to suggestions by Jorissen (2002) who argued that by better preparing second-career teachers, the more likely they were to continue teaching. Recognizing second-career teachers' unique skills and experiences and developing the ability to utilize those attributes would make those teachers more appealing to hiring administrators, as well as easing the teachers' transitions into the classroom, which could limit attrition.

School District Administrators

School administrators need to be made aware of the skills and experiences that make second-career teachers valuable resources to their students and school systems. Newly-hired second-career teachers would make excellent assets because their strongly-held identities as teachers promote confidence in meeting challenges head-on, as well as foster trust in maintaining professional behaviors in all of their interpersonal relationships. That supports Jarvis-Selinger's et al. (2010) position that the stronger the new teachers' sense of identity, the stronger they believed their confidence would carry them through adversities. When pairing newly-hired second-career teachers with mentors, consideration should be given to the unique needs of second-career teachers. Mentors should recognize and acknowledge second-career teachers' prior professional skills and should support them in learning to utilize those skills. Failing to recognize such an intrinsic component of second-career teachers' identities can foster frustration and

resentment that can lead to attrition. This reinforces Viczeko and Wright's (2010) recommendation that colleagues should collaborate with second-career teachers to support their knowledge and understandings of their new positions within their schools, thereby allowing second-career teachers to become socialized into their new identities. When weighing the relative merits of hiring new teacher candidates, administrators should give careful consideration to the unique attributes of second-career teachers.

Further Study

This study examined the experiences of 12 second-career teachers and their perceptions concerning the values of their prior professional skills and experiences. As little research was available detailing how second-career teachers value their prior skills and experiences, this qualitative study represented a first step in exploring that population as they first entered the classroom. Though appropriate for a hermeneutic phenomenological study, the sample size of 12 participants is nonetheless small and may not represent the experiences of all second-career teachers. Therefore, further studies would benefit from examining a larger sampling of second-career teachers.

While this study explored how second-career teachers perceived the ways in which teacher certification and school district administrators valued their prior skills and experiences, further studies should examine those valuations from the perspective of the administrators to seek any correlation in the data. Similarly, the experiences of first-career teachers also should be examined to assess any similarities or differences with regard to these second-career teachers' experiences.

As more qualitative data is collected, and a greater understanding of the essence of second-career teachers' experiences emerges, an appropriate set of follow-up studies

should collect quantitative data regarding their transitions into their classrooms and beyond. For example, researchers could statistically analyze various measures of academic success of students taught by second-career teachers, as well as compare those students' experiences and academic success with students taught by first-career teachers.

This research supported the results of previous studies examining the experiences of second-career teachers. The conclusions presented new insight into the high value second-career teachers place on their prior professional skills and experiences. This study also provided evidence that second-career teachers do not believe certification programs and district administrators place the same value on those skills and experiences. Further research on how administrators and colleagues perceive second-career teachers' skills and experiences is a necessary next step in order to examine any correlation with the findings presented here. To reduce attrition of second-career teachers it is recommended that administrators and colleagues recognize, develop, and utilize their prior professional skills and experiences as a resource to students and colleagues.

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Appendix A
Interview Questions

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your career(s) prior to teaching.
2. What eventually led you to consider leaving that career, and what led you to consider teaching as a second career?
3. What reservations did you have about leaving an already established career in order to become a teacher?
4. Prior to becoming a teacher, what, if any, professional skills or experiences did you believe would be of benefit in making you a successful teacher?
5. Please cite an example where having prior work experiences outside of the field of education has benefited you in the classroom?
6. Do you believe that you are better adjusted to the demands of the teaching profession as a result of having a prior career? How? Can you cite an example?
7. How do you feel your maturity level compared with other first year teachers? Did it provide any benefit, and if so, how?
8. Do you feel your teacher education program recognized or acknowledged your prior skills and experiences? What makes you say that?
9. Do you believe that your teacher education experience helped you to learn how to utilize your previous work experience in the classroom? Why or why not?
10. Do you believe that your certification program adequately prepared you for the realities of the classroom? Why or why not?
11. What could your teacher education program have done differently in order to capitalize on your unique skills and experiences?
12. Tell me about your first year of teaching. What did you find most challenging? How did you handle those challenges?
13. Do you ever feel regret over your choice to enter teaching? If so, what events or situations lead you to question your choice?
14. Could anything have been done to alleviate that feeling?
15. When you first entered the classroom, did you feel that colleagues and administrators recognized your prior work experiences? What led you to believe that?

16. Do you feel that colleagues and administrators valued those experiences as a possible resource? What led you to believe that?

17. Did you feel colleagues or administrators treated you differently than they treated first career teachers? If so, how? How did that make you feel?

18. Do you ever feel that your prior skills and experiences were underrated by colleagues or administrators? How did that make you feel?

19. In what ways have you tried to make colleagues and administrators aware of your prior skills and experiences and their potential benefits?

20. Do you feel the support your administrators provided adequately served your needs as a second-career teacher?