A Second Apprenticeship: The Career Transition of Trades Teachers

Barbara Gustafson
University of Saskatchewan

Dissertation 2015

The concept of *career* has changed with time to include not a singular path from adolescence through to retirement (Holland, 1985; Super, 1957) but changing paths, second careers, and *recycling* or repeating of earlier career stages in midlife (Super, 1990). Within education, research has looked at career changes leading to elementary and secondary teaching (e.g., Castro & Bauml, 2009; Eifler & Potthoff, 1998; Swain, Schmertzing & Schmertzing; 2011; Tigchelaar, Brouwer & Korthagen, 2008); however, there has been relatively little attention to post-secondary education and, particularly, vocational-technical education.

This sub-set of practitioners are, by definition, second-career teachers: vocational instructors, including those teaching apprenticeable trades, are recruited and hired as subject-matter experts based on training and experience from industry practice. As they move into a second career to become teachers, they could be expected to experience the usual disruptions of any midlife career change. Additionally, they might encounter particular difficulties due to the differences between their first and second career cultures. The broad occupational categories, commonly known as blue collar and white collar, have been shown to differ not only in work typically done and socio-economic class, but to use different learning methods, hold different values, and to have strong sociological separation between them (Lamont, 2000; Lamont & Molnar, 2002; Lubrano, 2004; Ryan & Sackrey, 1996).

This paper describes research conducted at three Western Canadian technical colleges to explore the career transition, or second apprenticeship, of individuals who moved from trades practice to teaching trades.

Methodology

This research set out to understand the career transition of tradespeople as they move to teaching in a college setting. The research question asked were: what motivates tradespeople to move to teaching; what competencies do they bring from the first career to the second; how do they learn to teach; how does the vocational identity change with a career change; and what are the factors leading to satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the teaching role.

Given the relatively meagre research in trades education, an exploratory mixed-methods approach was used. Using a constructivist approach to create a qualitative dominant crossover mixed analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013) gave voice to the self-defined reality of the participants. An electronic survey adapted portions of similar surveys conducted among teachers, although not trades teachers specifically (Berger & D'Ascoli, 2012; Dainty, 2012; Hong, 2010; Ruhland, 2001; Simmons, 2009; Watt & Richardson, 2007). This new instrument gathered input through email invitation and electronic submission from trades teachers at three Western Canadian colleges; 608 invitations were sent and 165 completed surveys were returned, for a return rate of 27%. This phase was followed by interpretation panels to explain the quantitative results and add further qualitative data (Noonan, 2002).

The survey was conducted in June 2014. The quantitative data were analyzed with statistical analysis software plus manual coding of qualitative survey data. The results of this analysis were compiled and shared with participants who had indicated a willingness to be a part of interpretation panels and had provided contact information in

The Canadian Journal of Career Development/Revue canadiene de développement de carrière

Volume 16, Number 2, 2017

the survey. In September through November 2014, participants (N = 12) at the three colleges were asked to interpret the survey results and to add further qualitative data through discussion. Panel results were transcribed, member checked, and manually coded.

The 165 respondents represented 27 trades. Ages ranged from 26 to 56 years or older, with the 46-55 years category chosen by 46% of respondents. Survey participants were asked to indicate the number of apprentices they had supervised while practicing their trade: 29% had supervised 26 or more while 10.3% indicated no supervision of apprentices. The survey was dominated by male respondents (97.6% vs. 2.4%), in keeping with the ratio of male to female participation in trades generally (LeFebvre, Simonova, & Wang, 2012). Years of teaching experience ranged from three years or less (21.2%) to 18 years or more as the most common response (21.8%). Participants were asked to indicate any teacher training prior to being hired to teach and the majority (85.5%) indicated no formal training in teaching.

Results

Motivation to Change Careers

The most common choice regarding motivation to change careers was *Teaching as an opportunity to share trades knowledge (95.8%)*. *Better hours of work*, described within comments and through the interpreta-

tion panels as primarily related to more time with family, received the second highest level of agreement (84.3%). The other six factors received considerably lower levels of agreement, from 49.1% for teaching as *Always something I wanted to do, that I felt called to do to 13.9%* for teaching as *An opportunity for higher pay.*

Transition to Teaching

Once the choice is made to change careers, a transition or "change from one state to another" occurs (Concise Canadian Oxford Dictionary, 2005, p. 1453). This portion of the research looked at the transition in terms of competencies brought to the new role and those developed within it. The preferred methods of learning to meet the requirements of teaching were also examined.

Teaching competencies. Participants were asked to rate themselves against a set of 17 competencies common to teaching, both as recalled from initial teaching experience and at the time of the survey. The competency list was established through an analysis of existing frameworks (Arreola, 2007; Campbell, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2012; Goldhaber, 2002; Schulman, 1986; Rockoff & Speroni, 2011; Volmari, Helakorpi, & Frimodt, 2009). When viewed through a Knowledge, Skills, Abilities and Other characteristics (KSAO) lens (Landy & Conte, 2007), the retrospective self-ratings showed strongest

agreement in the Abilities and Other categories, representing personality traits or characteristics such as sense of humour, organization, and enthusiasm for teaching. The points of least agreement were in Knowledge and Skills specific to teaching such as preparing lesson plans, use of educational technology, and curriculum development. Over time, it appears these competencies are strengthened, as the present-day self-ratings showed 90% or higher agreement levels.

The qualitative portion of the research supported these results, with interpretation panel participants expressing a strong feeling that, despite a lack of formal teacher training, teaching competencies had been gained through working with apprentices. In contrast to their view of the tradespersons as a teacher and ratings of teaching competencies brought to the new career, participants expressed the view that their employing institutions did not see them in the same light, often equating teaching competence to specific credentials such as an Education degree.

Learning about teaching. Respondents were asked how they increased their knowledge and skills about teaching and what learning methods they preferred to use. Respondents showed a definite preference for non-formal over formal learning. Survey questions asked what methods of learning had been used during their teaching career, ranging from formal classes at a univer-

sity, to self-study, and trial and error. Overall, respondents chose *discussions with other instructors* (96.4%) as the most often used method, with *informal mentoring* (87.9%) as the next most popular method. Formal training through a university or college was chosen the least (38.8%). Respondents with formal teacher training prior to being hired as a teacher were more likely to indicate use of formal training methods to continue learning about teaching.

Non-formal methods were also considered most effective. Mentoring was rated the most effective method of learning to teach; workshops were rated least effective. The interpretation panels supported these results. Participants expressed a strong dislike for academically oriented teacher training delivered in a classroom setting. They spoke in favour of a more practical focus, looking for information that could be easily translated into their work with students. Participants praised an informal mentorship program operating at one college as helpful to new teachers

and as building on the traditions of trades practice.

Vocational Identity

Vocational identity was defined by Marcia (1980) as a clear identification with a particular occupation or vocation, based on commitment following active exploration of possible identities. Creating a vocational identity is a part of career development (Graves, 1989; Korthagen, 2004; Simpson, 1967) and of overall identity formation throughout life stages (Erikson, 1980). Vocational identity was explored within the survey by one question: *Are you a tradesperson, a teacher, or both? If you met someone for the first time today, how would you describe yourself to this person? Respondents could choose one or more of three options: I'm a tradesperson (welder, electrician, etc.); I'm a teacher/instructor; and I'm a teacher/instructor in (welding, electrical, etc.).*

Respondents most often agreed with I'm a teacher/instructor in my trade; however, the other two statements were also agreed to in the majority of

instances. Frequency counts are shown in Table 1 below.

Interpretation panel participants expressed the view that they saw themselves as teachers while in trades practice through teaching apprentices, and that this role led them to consider the move to full-time teaching for a long time prior to making the transition. One participant suggested this previous practice of teaching apprentices may make the transition to full-time teaching easier for tradespeople than other vocational teachers. Another participant, however, saw a more defined change in roles occurring, linked to the transition from trades to college culture, saying "as an instructor, you are moving from blue [collar] to white. You are becoming part of the white [collar world]."

Satisfaction in the New Role

The final section within the research asked about the satisfaction respondents felt as teachers, both currently and in comparison to their beginning days as a teacher. Sources of

Table 1

Vocational Identity Frequency Counts and Missing Data for All Respondents

Statement	Agree	Disagree	No Response	Total
I'm a tradesperson	86	37	42	165
I'm a teacher/instructor	92	33	40	165
I'm a teacher/instructor in my trade	140	5	20	165

satisfaction and dissatisfaction and qualitative comments were also gathered. Overall, respondents rated themselves as somewhat satisfied (34.5%) or highly satisfied (60%) with teaching. This high level of satisfaction (94.5%) reported by participants suggests that the career transition from tradesperson to trades teacher has been successful for this sample group.

Most respondents said they were as satisfied with the role of teacher currently as when they began (45.5%), or were more satisfied currently (38.2%). From a list of factors that could lead to satisfaction, respondents most often agreed with the statement *I feel rewarded when students succeed* (99.4%). The statement *I feel my work is valued by my institution* received the least agreement (47.8%).

Discussion and Recommendations

This research explored the career transition of tradespeople to teachers and its findings relate to this specific group; however, they may also hold true for others moving from industry to teaching. Recommendations emerged that could assist in a successful transition to the second career of vocational post-secondary teacher. Recruitment efforts should focus on the opportunity to train the next generation and continue within the first career in a new way within a new role, and promote the improved work-life balance possible as a teacher. The opportunity for continued connection to the first career, through leave for industry practice, should be a part of the employment package.

When providing teacher training programs, a focus on practical and non-formal processes is more likely to be accepted by trades teachers than more academic methods. Teacher training specifically designed for trades, building on the apprenticeship learning model, and utilizing practices of non-formal, tacit learning, could support the pre-existing identity of teacher.

Creating a stronger sense of inclusion could help retain trades teachers. Trades teachers want to see institutional management recognize their work and the contribution of trades programs to the college. This recognition, whether in the form of a casual conversation, being featured in institutional advertising, through inclusion of journeypersons in the management ranks, or other means, would be welcomed and would encourage retention of teachers.

References

Arreola, R.A. (2007). Developing a comprehensive faculty evaluation system. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Berger, J., & D'Ascoli, Y. (2012). Becoming a VET teacher as a second career: investigating the determinants of career choice and their relation to perceptions about prior occupation. Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education, 40(3), 317-341. doi: 10.1080/1359866X.2012.700046

Campbell, S.J. (2009). A survey of community college faculty, their teaching methodologies, and congruence with student learning needs (Doctoral dissertation). Walden University, Minneapolis, MN.

Castro, A.J., & Bauml, M. (2009). Why now? Factors associated with choosing teaching as a second career and their implications for teacher education programs. Teacher Education Quarterly, 36 (3), 113-126. Retrieved from: http://www.jstor.org/stable/23479192

Concise Canadian Oxford Dictionary. (2005). Don Mills, Canada: Oxford University Press.Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V.L. (2011). Designing and conducting mixed methods research. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Dainty, J. (2012). Predicting factors of secondary career and technical education teachers' intent to stay in the profession (Doctoral dissertation). University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2012). Creating a comprehensive system for evaluating and supporting effective teaching. Stanford, CA: Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education.

Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N.

K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research, (pp. 1–32). Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage Publications.

Eifler, K., & Potthoff, D.E. (1998). Nontraditional teacher education students: a synthesis of the literature. Journal of Teacher Education. 49(3), 187-195. doi:10.1177/0022487198049003004

Erikson, E. (1980). Identity and the life cycle. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company.

Frels, R.K., & Onwuegbuzie. A.J. (2013). Administering quantitative instruments with qualitative interviews: A mixed research approach. Journal of Counseling & Development, 91(2), 184-194. doi: 10.1002/j.1556-6676.2013.00085.x

Goldhaber, D. (2002). The mystery of good teaching. Education Next, 2(1), 50-55. ProQuest document ID: 1237764529

Graves, B. (1989). Informal aspects of apprenticeship in selected American occupations. In M. W. Coy (Ed.), Apprenticeship: From theory to method and back again (pp 51-64). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Holland, J.L. (1985). Making vocational choices: A theory of vocational personalities and work environments. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Hong, J.Y. (2010). Pre-service and beginning teachers' professional identity and its relation to dropping out of the profession. Teaching and Teacher Education, 26, 1530-1543. doi: 10.1016/j.tate.2010.06.003

Korthagen, F.A.J. (2004). In search of the essence of a good teacher: towards a more holistic approach in teacher education. Teaching and Teacher Education, 20, 77-97. doi: 10.1016/j.tate.2003.10.002

Lamont, M. (2000). The dignity of working men: Morality and the boundaries of race, class, and immigration. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Lamont, M., & Molnar, V. (2002). The study of boundaries in the social sciences. Annual Review of Sociology. 28: 167-195. doi: 10.1146/annurev.soc.28.110601.141107

Landy, F.J. & Conte, J.M. (2007). Work in the 21st Century: An introduction to industrial and organizational psychology. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Lefebvre, R., Simonova, E., & Wang, L. (2012). Labour shortages in skilled trades – The best guestimate? Ottawa, Canada: Certified General Accountants Association of Canada.

Lubrano, A. (2004). Limbo: Blue-collar roots, white-collar dreams. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley.

Marcia, J. E. (1980). Identity in adolescence. In J. Adelson (Ed.), Handbook of adolescent psychology (pp. 158-187). New York, NY: Wiley.

Noonan, B. (2002). Interpretation panels and collaborative research. Brock Education, 12(1), 89-100.

Rockoff, J. E., & Speroni, C. (2011). Subjective and objective evaluations of teacher effectiveness: Evidence from New York City. Labour Economics 18, 687–696. doi: 10.1016/j.labeco.2011.02.004

Ruhland, S. K., (2001, December 16). Factors influencing the turnover and retention of Minnesota's secondary career and technical education teachers. Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Career and Technical Education, New Orleans, LA.

Ryan, J., & Sackrey, C. (Eds.) (1996). Strangers in paradise: Academics from the working class. Boston, MA: South End Press.

Schulman, L. (1986). Those who understand: Knowledge growth in teaching. Educational Researcher, 15(2), 4-14. :10.3102/0013189X015002004

Simmons, T.M. (2009). The Preparing Future Faculty (PFF) program: Examining relationships and regressions among professional identity, career expectations, and teaching efficacy (Doctoral dissertation). Howard University, Washington, DC.

Simpson, I.H. (1967). Patterns of socialization into professions: the case of stu-

dent nurses. Sociological Inquiry, 37(1), 47-54. doi: 10.1111/j.1475-682X.1967. tb00637.x

Swain, G., Schmertzing, L., & Schmertzing, R. (2011). A qualitative investigation of the impact of early-career experience on teachers with alternative certification. Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin, 77(4), 59-66. Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com. cyber.usask.ca/ docview/905838568

Super, D.E. (1957). The psychology of careers: An introduction to vocational development. New York, NY: Harper.

Super, D.E. (1990). A life span, life-space approach to career development. In D. Brown, & L. Brooks (Eds.) Career choice and development (pp. 197-261). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Tigchelaar, A., Brouwer, N., & Korthagen, F. (2008). Crossing horizons: Continuity and change during second-career teachers' entry into teaching. Teaching and Teacher Education, 24, 1130-1550. doi:10.1016/j. tate.2008.03.001

Volmari, K., Helakorpi, S., & Frimodt, R. (2009). Competence framework for VET professions: Handbook for practitioners. Sastamala, Finland: Finnish National Board of Education.

Watt, H.M.G., & Richardson, P.W. (2007). Motivational factors influencing teaching as a career choice: Development and validation of the FIT-Choice scale. Journal of Experimental Education, 75, 167–202. doi:10.3200/ JEXE.75.3.167-202