Factors in adults' decisions to enter educational fields

Pamela Anne Schiffbauer
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FACTORS IN ADULTS' DECISIONS TO ENTER EDUCATIONAL FIELDS

by

Pamela Schiffbauer

A DISSERTATION STUDY

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Education

Major: Educational Administration

Under the Supervision of Dr. Martha Bruckner

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Spring, 2001
DISSERTATION TITLE
Factors in Adults’ Decisions to Enter Educational Fields

BY
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Abstract

FACTORS IN ADULTS’ DECISIONS TO ENTER EDUCATIONAL FIELDS

Pamela Schiffbauer

University of Nebraska at Omaha, 2001

Advisor: Dr Martha Bruckner

The purpose of this study was to examine the reasons that persons in non-educational careers enter educational fields. Fifteen education majors at the University of Nebraska at Omaha participated in this study. Ten of the participants were from the University of Nebraska at Omaha’s Program for Special Undergraduates and five of the participants were from the University of Nebraska at Omaha’s Teacher Academy Project.

The study results indicated that salary was not a major factor in the career decisions of most of the participants. Some of the participants may have been unrealistic in anticipating that their teaching career would afford them more time, less isolation, and/or an opportunity to improve society. Participants in the age range of 18 to 29 years tended to seek employment in educational fields in order to expand their job skills, interact with people and obtain autonomy; participants in the age range of 40 to 50 years tended to seek employment in educational fields for altruistic reasons. The study also revealed that most of the participants have family members who are in educational careers or have been in educational careers in the past.
The researcher suggests that further exploration of differing motivations for entering educational careers would provide important insights for school administrators, college department chairpersons, and state legislators.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe a huge debt of gratitude to Dr. Martha Bruckner, my committee chairperson, for her excellent guidance and continuing patience as I developed themes from the dissertation findings and rewrote and rewrote and rewrote. She kept urging me to “sit under a tree and think about what you really think is important about these findings.” This advice should be recommended to all doctoral students.

My other committee members, Dr. Larry Dlugosh, Dr. Gary Hartzell, and Dr. John Hill, were unfailing in their support and interest. I know that they had many other students to assist, but they always conveyed the impression that my dissertation was as important to them as it was to me.

I am very appreciative of Dr. Laura Schulte, who guided me through the first three chapters of my dissertation with such assurance that I actually began to believe that I would at least be able to complete the dissertation proposal phase.

John, my husband, and Bob and Amy, my children, were also instrumental in editing and providing encouragement. I thank them for their faithful support.

Most of all, I would like to acknowledge my first and best teachers: my parents, Robert and Mildred Timmerman.
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CHAPTER I

Introduction

"No bubble is so iridescent or floats longer than one blown by the successful teacher" Osler, 1911. Unfortunately, our floating bubble is about to burst due to a serious problem in education today: the teacher shortage. At a time when fewer persons are entering the field and more teachers are leaving, we are faced with the fact that, in this decade, 2 million additional teachers will be needed in America's schools (Fetler, 1997; "Who Should Teach?", 2000).

Increasing concern about this teacher shortage is motivating educators and state and federal legislators to examine different methods of coping with the problem. Such options include providing salary increases, offering signing bonuses to new teachers, mentoring new teachers, increasing the age for retirement, recruiting retired teachers to work part-time and providing programs for alternative certification (Haselkorn, 1997; Gursky, 2000/2001). Alternative certification, which is being used successfully in many states (Miller, McKenna, & McKenna, 1998; Feistritzer, 1999), will be a focus in this study.

This study involved two University of Nebraska at Omaha Department of Education Programs. The Teacher Academy Project (TAP), an alternative certification program, addresses the teacher shortage in such seriously understaffed areas as mathematics and science (Haselkorn, 1997; Kronholz, 1997; Ingersoll, 1998), English as
a Second Language (Chin, 1998; Yasin, 1998), technology (Bradley, 1998; Chin, 1998; Litowitz, 1998), and special education (Bradley, 1998; Fishbaugh & Christensen, 1998; Ludlow, 1998). Participants in this program and students in the Program for Special Undergraduates (PSU) at UNO's Department of Education were invited to participate in this study. The PSU supports the educational endeavors of undergraduates who have pursued careers in non-educational fields and now wish to obtain a degree in education.

Purpose of the Qualitative Study

The purpose of this study was to explore reasons why workers in non-educational fields decide to enter education as a career. Since TAP and PSU students have been employed in non-educational fields, they served as a relevant study population.

Research Questions

Grand Tour Question:

What are the factors influencing the decision to change careers to the field of education?

Subquestions:

- What experiences have the participants had in their current or most recent job?
- What people, if any, influenced the participants' decisions to enter the educational field?
- What are the goals of mid career workers changing into the educational field?
- What are the perceived benefits of pursuing a degree in education at this point in their lives?
• What are the anticipated difficulties, if any, of pursuing an education degree?
• What life changes, if any, did the participants make as a result of this decision?
• What life changes, if any, do the participants anticipate having to make as a result of this decision?
• What career goals do the participants have?

**Theoretical Perspective**

Although the original intention of this study was to develop a substantive level theory about factors in adults’ decisions to enter educational careers, results provided initial information only.

Therefore, an initial exploratory approach was used in this study. The researcher collected the data (interviews with TAP and PSU enrollees) and compared the data to determine if there were any emerging categories. The data were viewed through the lens of current career path theories to determine if there were any concurring categories between the data analysis and the different theories.

**Definition of Terms**

The following terms are used throughout this dissertation:

*Alternative certification* is the process by which college graduates who may or may not have educational degrees, become eligible to teach. The process for alternative certification ranges from “emergency certification to very sophisticated and well designed programs that address the professional preparation needs of the growing population of individuals who already have at least a baccalaureate degree and considerable life experience and want to become teachers” (Feistritzer, 1999, p. 2).
Initial exploration is a qualitative research approach that examines a specific problem or population. After analyzing the data to form recurring categories, emergent categories are then compared to existing theories to determine if there are shared categories.

At the time of this study, Generation X has been used to describe persons who are currently between the ages of 18 and 29 (Levine, 1994).

The Metropolitan Omaha Educational Consortium is an organization comprised of educators from the seven Omaha, Nebraska and Council Bluffs, Iowa public school districts and the University of Nebraska at Omaha College of Education. Its function is to enhance the educational process in the metropolitan Omaha area.

The University of Nebraska at Omaha has an undergraduate program, Program for Special Undergraduates, which facilitates the educational progress of education undergraduates who have had careers in non-educational fields. The program is based in UNO’s Department of Teacher Education and currently enrolls approximately 100 students.

The Teacher Academy Project is a one year program by which non-education major graduates take classes and practice in classrooms in order to obtain an alternative certificate to teach in participating school districts in the Omaha area. The project is based at the University of Nebraska at Omaha and had 19 participants in the 2000-2001 academic year. It is sponsored by the University of Nebraska at Omaha and the Metropolitan Omaha Educational Consortium.

The teacher labor pool is comprised of current teachers, educational majors,
college students, certified persons who are currently not teaching, and non-education graduates who are eligible for alternative certification consideration.

Assumptions, Limitations and Delimitations

An assumption of this study was that respondents would be honest in their answers.

The study was limited by the fact that participation in the research study was voluntary, and thus respondents may not be representative of all of the Teacher Academy Project or Program for Special Undergraduates participants. The study may be further limited in the fact that I was the only interviewer and my biases may have influenced the interview process and the analysis of data.

The study was delimited to current (2000-2001) students enrolled at the University of Nebraska at Omaha as education majors and examined only those who are planning to enter the educational field after pursuing careers in other areas.

Significance of the Study

This study may provide insight for public school administrators and graduate school faculty in recruiting potential educators who are currently employed in non-educational fields. Since the Teacher Academy Project addresses the teacher shortage in such seriously understaffed areas as mathematics and science, English as a Second Language, technology, and special education, this study might provide additional information to help administrators alleviate teacher shortages in those fields. The study will contribute to the body of research on career path cycles.
CHAPTER II
Review of the Literature

This literature review examines the research relevant to the topic of the teacher shortage and pertinent theories of career changes into the field of education. A discussion of the theories relevant to the study results is discussed in Chapter Five.

The teacher shortage has recently become a cause of serious concern for educational administrators. During the next ten years, estimates are that two million new teachers will be needed in America's schools because student enrollments are predicted to increase, and the labor pool of teachers is expected to decrease as current teachers retire (Haselkorn, 1997). Adding to the problem is the fact that many teachers who graduate from the teacher education programs may never actually teach (Yasin, 1998).

Theoretical Perspective

There are many career path theories. Most of them cluster into two main perspectives: linear career paths and non-linear career paths.

Schein (1978) states that career paths follow age-related life patterns and that workers experience a "mid-career" crisis similar to the "mid-life" crisis. Schein believes that this career change period can be one of phenomenal growth in that it can be the catalyst for the worker to pursue other career paths. Schultz (1971), in his Human Capital Theory, states that workers seek additional education in order to have more career
choices, receive higher earnings, or to achieve greater job satisfaction. Erikson (1974) theorizes that people at this stage in their lives benefit from ignoring thoughts of aging and death and instead pursue the only true source of joy: the striving to make the world a better place.

Hall and Mirvis (1995), however, believe that career paths are not linear and no longer follow the “education, work, retire” pattern. Other theorists concur that careers may sometimes be linear but can also be recurring cycles of these patterns or blended patterns in which workers concurrently go to school, work and have leisure activities (Perspectives, 1988).

Leibowitz and Lea (1985) state that career paths are spirical, and job changes may be a result of unanticipated events (divorce, family move), anticipated events (marriage, empty nest); and non-events (non-job promotion). They further believe that the initial job choice may not have been the worker’s own decision or that it didn’t meet his/her expections. They also suggest that a person may desire a job change in order to have more money, more family time or a job which more closely matches current life values.

The Teacher Shortage

Many states are reporting an alarming trend related to the teacher shortage. In 1997, a Minnesota school district had numerous job openings in technology and special education. For some of those positions, there was only one applicant (Bradley, 1998). In California, the K-5 Class Size Reduction Initiative, which demanded a student-to-teacher ratio of 20 to 1, resulted in a serious teaching shortage (Turley & Nakai, 1998).
In Maryland, the "baby boom echo" increased the public school population 22.8% from 1988-1998; while the "baby boomers" were exiting from the profession either through resignations or retirement (Kronholz, 1997; Chin, 1998).

Causes of the teacher shortage. There are many causes for this shortage. One of the causes is the fact that more than 6% of the nation’s teachers are leaving the profession each year. Since one third have been teaching for more than 20 years, a high retirement rate can be expected. However, 20% of those leaving the classroom are not retiring - they are resigning (Kronholz, 1997).

In addition, many graduates of teacher education programs do not enter the teaching field (Gursky, 2000/2001). In fact, only about 75% of teacher program graduates even apply for a teaching job. According to a study by the National Center for Education Statistics of 1992-93, education major graduates who did not enter a career in education by 1997 gave these reasons for their decisions:

- no longer interested in teaching 46%
- haven’t taken or couldn’t pass the test or not yet certified 30%
- needed more education 25%
- wanted other occupation 20%
- more money in other job offered 10%
- low pay 7%
- already had teaching job 3%
- more prestige in other job offered 2%
jobs hard to get 2%
poor teaching conditions 2%
had coursework, but not ready to apply 2%
student teaching was discouraging 1%
other 34%

(Henke, Chen, Geis, & Knepper, 2000, p. 21).


These factors may influence Nebraska's ability to acquire qualified teachers. For example, 25% of the University of Nebraska at Lincoln's 1999 teacher graduates entered a non-educational profession (LB 1377 Quality Professional Educators Act, 2000). Furthermore, the Metropolitan Omaha Educational Consortium estimates that 12% of the Omaha area's educational majors never teach in the Omaha area (Metropolitan Omaha Educational Consortium, undated). Recently, the Nebraska Department of Education studied college alumni of Nebraska colleges who had graduated as education majors. As the following table shows, except for graduates of the College of St Mary, Doane College, and Hastings College, the majority of the study participants initially chose a career not in education.
Table 1

Career Choices of Education Majors in Nebraska Colleges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Number of Initial Certificates in 1996</th>
<th>Number and Percent Teaching in 1997-8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chadron State</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of St Mary</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concordia University</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creighton University</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dana College</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doane College</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hastings College</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN-Kearney</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midland College</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru State</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union College</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN-Lincoln</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN-Omaha</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wayne State</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weselyan University</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>York College</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Nebraska Department of Education, undated)
Overall, only 37% of all Nebraska's education majors stay and teach in Nebraska. Most work in Nebraska's private sector organizations or move to another state in order to receive higher pay ("A Great Monday for Teachers," 2001).

These are alarming statistics when linked with the projection that the number of Midwestern public high school graduates will increase 13% during the 1996-2008 year span (Gerald & Hussar, 1999), and that nearly 20% of those who do enter the profession leave within three years (The Condition of Education, 1998). Fidelar and Haselkorn (1999) estimate that 200,000 additional teachers will be needed each year during the next decade.

Areas of special need. The problem is particularly acute in areas such as English as a Second Language, technology, science and mathematics (Chin, 1998; "Field Facts," 2000). In fact, the American Association for Employment in Education (1999) states that the top ten areas of teacher shortages nationally are as follows (listed from greatest need): speech pathology remedial classes; multiple handicapped disability special education; technology education; behavioral disorder special education; learning disability special education; computer science education; mentally handicapped special education; hearing impaired special education; physics instruction; and chemistry instruction. In Nebraska, the greatest shortages are in these areas (listed from greatest need): special education, science, mathematics, foreign language, industrial technology, media, speech pathology, vocal or instrumental music, business, and family/consumer science (Omaha 2000.2000). Shortages in these or similar areas have led states to allow teachers to teach in subject areas outside of their licensure.
Ingersoll (1998) states that one-third of all high school mathematics teachers are teaching without a mathematics major or minor. One-fourth of the English teachers do not have a major or minor in English or a related field such as speech, journalism or literature. The situation is even worse in science and social studies high school classes where 50% of the students are being taught by teachers with degrees in other fields. Ingersoll estimates that each year, several million students are taught by teachers who are not certified in the subjects they are teaching. In fact, the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future estimates that there are 50,000 teachers who use emergency or substandard licenses each year (Statistics on Teaching in America, 1996).

Responses to the teacher shortage. To meet this need, state and district leaders are offering various benefits to potential and/or current teachers. Twenty-seven states offer financial aid for prospective teachers in the form of loan forgiveness programs or scholarships. Many school districts offer signing bonuses to new teachers. Some states will waive the competency exam for teachers, especially if their expertise is in a subject area that is particularly hard to fill. Nebraska and other states offer advantageous home loan programs to teachers. Nebraska’s program, the Teacher Next Door, offers teachers foreclosed homes for 50% less than the market value (Matczak, 2001). States may also offer tax exemptions for teachers (Bergan, 2000; Davis, 2000). Many state legislatures are examining ways to increase teachers’ salaries. Other incentives include offering full retention of retirement benefits to teachers who return to teaching; implementing greater reciprocity of state acceptance of teacher licensures from other states; streamlined application processes so new recruits have a less frustrating time becoming employed;
national job search opportunities on the internet; and enhanced recruitment of high school
and college graduates into the field of education ("Who Should Teach?", 2000; Gursky,

**Alternative teacher certification.** Attempts by the states to alleviate the teacher
shortage by waiving or easing the certification requirements are defined as alternative
teacher certification. This process minimizes the teacher program educational
requirements and increases on-the-job training (Zumwalt, 1996). A 1998 survey
by the National Center for Education Information reports that only a few states (Alaska,
Kansas, Montana, North Dakota, Rhode Island) do not have or are not even considering
some form of alternative certification (Feistritzer, 1998). As of 2000, four states
(Indiana, Iowa, Nevada, and Vermont) were either considering implementation or had
proposed alternatives and all of the rest of the states had already implemented alternative
teacher certification policies (Status of State Teacher Preparation Alternatives
to Certification, 2000).

In Nebraska, efforts are being made to provide "fast track" routes to teacher
certification. The University of Nebraska at Omaha, Creighton University, the University
of Nebraska-Lincoln, and the University of Nebraska-Kearney provide alternative
certification programs to those interested in teaching.

These teacher certification programs have been met with acceptance by some
educators and with alarm, or at least caution, by others. Natriello (1992) believes that
the alternative certification adds these four positive aspects to our educational system:
(a) the state departments of education are more involved in recruiting new teachers;
(b) there is more attention paid to improving teacher quality through careful selection processes; (c) there is greater effort in examining teacher education program curriculum; and (d) classroom teachers are becoming more involved in teacher preparation.

Feistritzer (1994) describes the programs as adding to the richness of the educational experience because the alternatively certified teachers have come from a different vocational background than traditional teachers and, thus, bring their own particular expertise. She does, however, caution that many alternative certification programs do not include the essential elements of strong academic coursework, early classroom experiences, mentor teachers, and strong collaboration between the school districts and teacher education programs.

Darling-Hammond (2000), after surveying the results of many studies, agrees that states need to ensure that the teacher alternative certification programs do not result in lower student achievement. The research indicates a correlation between students’ high achievement and fully certified teachers, although she admits that causation has not been proven. Hanushek (1996) concurs. Other researchers fear that lowering the certification standards threatens the educational progress of our most at-risk students: the students of the inner cities (Ashton 1996; Sandham, 1997). Zumwalt (1996) urges caution in endorsing alternative teacher certification programs.

In the face of a severe teacher shortage, it is important to examine all aspects of recruiting and retaining methods. One method, alternative teacher certification, is too new to adequately judge its effect on student test scores, teacher retention and school budgets. However, we can enhance the teacher certification programs by fine-tuning
alternative teacher educational programs, providing early field experiences and mentoring.

**Responses addressed in this research study.** The specific Teacher Academy Project at the University of Nebraska at Omaha provides the opportunity for persons from non-educational fields to become licensed teachers by providing specially designed coursework and on-the-job training. The project seeks to recruit new teachers in severely depleted subject areas such as English as a Second Language, science, mathematics, technology and special education. Area school districts provide site placement for the on-the-job training and ensure job placement upon graduation.

The specific Program for Special Undergraduates at the University of Nebraska at Omaha provides counseling and guidance to those nontraditional students who decide to enter the field of education.

**Summary**

While there is adequate research literature on career path theories and the teacher shortage, the extent of the existent literature on reasons for entering teaching or possible ways of recruiting or retaining teachers is limited. Assumptions that salary incentives or other monetary rewards will solve the teacher shortage seem not to be, at this time, supported in the research literature.
CHAPTER III

Methodology

The Qualitative Research Paradigm

This study was conducted using qualitative research methodology.

Qualitative research design encompasses descriptive rather than numerative results and, as such, relies heavily on the verbal expression of participants and on the process of exploration rather than on “proof.” Rather than a quantitative gathering of data, the focus is on amassing in-depth interview data, driven by the feelings, perceptions and thought processes of participants. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe this as the focus of the research. This study’s focus was the factors leading to the decisions of the participants to enter the educational field.

Initial Exploration Approach

By collecting data from interviews and examining that data to identify clusters and categories of responses, the researcher explored possible reasons for entering the teaching profession. The literature review was conducted following the data analysis to determine if any existing theories in non-educational fields correlate to any “patterns” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) found in the participants’ responses. For this type of research design, Creswell recommends reviewing the literature after data analysis as “it becomes a basis for comparing and contrasting findings of the qualitative study” (1994, p. 23).
The Researcher’s Role

In qualitative research, it is important that the researcher state any personal biases, perceptions, and experiences that might influence his/her role in the study.

I was a student in Omaha Public Schools from kindergarten through twelfth grade. My educational experiences at the University of Nebraska at Omaha involve an undergraduate degree in elementary education, a master’s degree in guidance and counseling and doctoral work in educational administration. I have been employed at one of the school districts involved in the TAP (Omaha Public Schools) as a fifth grade teacher and as a Talented and Gifted Program teacher. These experiences have all been positive, so I may bring some biases to my role as a researcher. I am currently employed as assistant principal at a private, parochial, elementary school. Since this school is in a district that is not involved in the TAP, I did not have any conflict of interests. Half of my years of employment have been in non-educational settings. I have been employed by the University of Nebraska Medical Center and the Southwest Iowa Coalition for Families. I am familiar with the topics of career changes, education, mid-life experiences and the teacher shortage.

I made every effort to collect the data objectively and without bias. However, I do have some perceptions that may have influenced my role as a researcher. I think that the teacher shortage is the most serious issue in education today because I believe that a competent, caring teacher is the main factor in a student’s success or failure.

Furthermore, I think that persons from a noneducational field might bring a
richness of experiences into the educational process that could add to the insight and understanding of teachers and students.

Because of my interest in the teacher shortage, I chose nontraditional entry into educational careers as the topic for this dissertation. I briefly discussed my dissertation topic with Dr. John Langan, the chairperson of the Teacher Education Department at the University of Nebraska at Omaha and Ms. Becky Schnabel, UNO Program Director for PSU. Both were agreeable to my pursuing this course of study for my dissertation.

Bounding the Study and Data Collection

The settings for the study were sites at the University of Nebraska at Omaha or in the homes of the participants or my own home, depending upon the convenience of the participants and the availability of space. The University of Nebraska at Omaha is a Midwestern state university with more than 450 faculty members, 95 baccalaureate degree programs and 66 advanced degree programs. Most of the students come from within a 100 mile radius of the school, but one-third of the students come from the rest of the country and from 60 other countries. The student population is diverse in culture, race and religion (University of Nebraska at Omaha Undergraduate Catalog, LIV, 1998-1999, p. 5).

The informants in this study were the current participants in the Teacher Academy Project and the Program for Special Undergraduates at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. I sent cover letters and survey sheets to 106 students (see Appendix A and B). Of those, 38 students responded positively to my invitation to
participate. From that group, I chose 15 participants based on representation from the TAP and PSU programs, gender and age. The demographic information on the participants is as follows: ten participants were from PSU and five were from TAP; nine were female and six were male; and five were under the age of 29, five were between the ages of 30 and 39, and five were 40 years or older.

The research study participants were interviewed individually and asked identical questions initially (see Appendix C). Follow-up questions were devised as needed in order to help them clarify and describe their reasons for pursuing a career in education.

After initial analysis of the findings, I developed a questionnaire to send to the 23 students who had agreed to be in the study but hadn’t been chosen for an interview (see Appendix D). Nine students returned the questionnaires and their responses were compared to those of the interviewed participants to determine if there were common reasons for not entering education in the past and for entering education now.

**Ethical Considerations**

Ethical standards were maintained as I interviewed participants and analyzed the collected data. Prior to any activities related to the research, I informed potential participants of the purposes of the study, the confidentiality standards that would be employed, the data collection, analysis, and verification methods that would be utilized, and their rights as participants. I obtained written permission from the participants before proceeding. Participants’ anonymity was upheld throughout the process. Their names were not used and participant descriptives were written in the narrative so that no respondents could be identified.
All transcripts, tapes, and field notes were stored for audit.

I obtained Institutional Review Board approval.

At no time during the research process did I receive funding from an institution involved in either the TAP and PSU programs except for the $1,000 UNO scholarship that I received for Summer 2000 tuition.

Data Collection Strategies

I sent a letter to potential participants and scheduled face-to-face interviews of voluntary study participants for the months of August and September of 2000. Each interview lasted approximately one hour; identical questions were asked initially, then follow-up questions were asked as needed. Each interview was tape-recorded and transcribed. After each interview was transcribed, I encoded the data and sent a copy of the encoding to the participant interviewed. I enclosed a self-addressed, stamped postal card on which the participant wrote his or her confirmation of accuracy or corrections and returned the card to me. All participants responded either by mail or by phone and I corrected the data as needed. I kept a field notebook of my impressions of the participants.

Data Analysis Procedures

Creswell (1994) states that data collection and analysis should occur simultaneously. This was particularly true in this research study as I was having the interviews transcribed and was encoding responses by categories at the same time as I was conducting further interviews of other participants. During the interview stage of the data collection process, I also recorded in my field notebook my impressions of the
participants. These activities allowed me to reflect on the data and helped me in my analysis of the information. I used Glaser and Strauss’s (1967) constant comparative method of data analysis. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) state that “this method provides the beginning researcher with a clear path for engaging in analysis of substantial amounts of data in a way that is both challenging and illuminating” (p. 127). Using this method, I compared each new “unit of meaning” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) with all other collected units of meaning to add to existing categories or to form new ones. As I collected the data, some categories emerged; others failed to develop. After all of the data had been analyzed, I reviewed the literature to determine if aspects of the current career path theories corresponded to any of the categories. From this data analysis, commonalities emerged.

Verification

I took two steps to ensure internal validity. First, I utilized triangulation of data collection by interviewing and keeping a field notebook; reviewing literature about common themes of the study; and collecting survey information from those students who had agreed to be in the study but whom I hadn’t interviewed.

I also offered each interviewed participant the opportunity to read the transcript encoding analysis of his/her interview to allow member checking of my transcripts. He/she evaluated the accuracy of my reporting and analysis to ensure the trustworthiness of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I corrected the information as needed.

For external validity, I realize that the findings will be generalizable only to a limited degree. Many factors will influence how generalizable the participants’
perceptions and experiences are in comparison to those participants in other alternative certification programs in the country. In this metropolitan area, there is low unemployment, many school districts in which to apply for teaching jobs, and a history of relatively calm, supportive relations between the community and the schools. These factors could influence the generalizability of the findings.

Before presenting the dissertation to my committee, I gave all collected data and analysis records to an auditor in order to verify the valid methodology of data collection and analysis (see Appendix E).

Reporting the Findings

This is a naturalistic study. I am reporting the findings in a narrative format. Descriptions of participants, their perceptions and experiences, as well as my own perceptions of the discussions are included in this narrative in order to provide a data display.
CHAPTER IV

Report of the Findings

This chapter is organized in terms of this main research question, "What are the factors influencing the decision to change careers to the field of education?" Factors which are explored are related to goals and support systems as well as to anticipated lifestyle changes, benefits, and difficulties.

Descriptions of the Participants

(No real names are used in this analysis.)

Colleen Alexander was a Caucasian female in her twenties. She was single. She exhibited poise and a reflective attitude during the interview which took place at UNO. Colleen seemed confident of her ability to succeed. She had a bachelor's degree in English. She was employed part-time at an area business at an annual salary of $23,000. She was in the PSU program in order to receive a language arts certification for secondary education. Colleen had many friends and relatives who were in education, and she exhibited an intense interest in the arts and travel.

Kim Andrews was a Caucasian, single female in her twenties. She seemed very self-assured during the interview which took place at UNO. She answered the questions in a definite manner. Kim had a bachelor's degree in mathematics. She was last employed in a bank as a temporary worker in customer service for less than five months. She was in the TAP program in order to receive a master's degree in education with a
mathematics endorsement. Kim was very interested in travel and learning about people.

Donna Bathgate was a Caucasian female in her forties. She described herself as a “warm, fuzzy person” during the interview in my home. She had a master’s degree in counseling and was self-employed as a salesperson. Her annual income was under $30,000. She was in the PSU program in order to receive a bachelor’s degree in elementary education. Her husband and children were very important to her and she mentioned them many times during the interview.

Lynne Broderick was a Caucasian female in her forties with an annual income of $250,000. The interview took place in her elegant home where she cared for many of her children’s friends on a short term basis. Lynne was bright, verbal and excited about helping children. She had a doctoral level degree and was in the PSU program in order to receive a secondary education bachelor’s degree in social studies and history. She was very interested in travel and the arts.

Cole Brunning was a Caucasian, married male in his thirties who was employed as a manager for a salary of over $30,000. During the interview at UNO, his two foster children sat quietly nearby. He had a doctoral level degree and was in the PSU program. He intended to receive a degree in chemistry. He was very serious about career goals and was particularly interested in coaching.

Bob Callobero was a Caucasian male in his forties who had been employed for almost twenty years in a social service agency. He was married with children. He gave articulate, reflective answers during the interview at his home. His annual income range was between $30-50,000. He had a bachelor’s degree in a social services related field.
His intent was to earn a bachelor’s degree in elementary education while in the PSU program. He had an intense interest in helping inner-city families.

David Davis was a Caucasian male in his thirties who worked in an office for an annual salary under $30,000. He was married with a stepchild. During the interview at UNO, he was soft-spoken and reflective. He had a master’s degree in music and was in the PSU program in order to receive a bachelor’s degree in secondary education in social studies and history. He had many family members who were or had been teachers.

Ann Gray was a Caucasian female who worked in a school setting for a salary of under $30,000. During the interview in her home, she was initially reserved but grew more out-going as the interview proceeded. Ann was married with children. She viewed her entry into the teaching profession as “a career…not just a job.”

Bill Jeffreys was a Caucasian, single male in his twenties who worked in journalism. During the interview at UNO, he mentioned his parents and siblings frequently. He earned an annual salary of less than $30,000. He had a bachelor’s degree in journalism and wanted to receive a degree in secondary education in the field of social studies. He had many friends and family members who were or had been teachers.

Georgia Lewin was a Caucasian, married female in her thirties who received a salary in the range of $30,000-50,000 in the medical field. During the interview in her home, she responded efficiently to the interruptions by her two pre-school aged children. Her goal in the PSU program was to receive a bachelor’s in elementary education and ultimately a master’s in counseling. She planned her educational progress in the PSU program in conjunction with the time constraints inherent in her employment and
her family obligations.

Peggy O'Malley was a Caucasian female in her twenties who was previously employed in business for an annual salary less than $30,000. During the interview at UNO, she was bright and articulate. Peggy was single and lived with her parents. She had a bachelor’s degree in math and planned to obtain a secondary education endorsement in math while in the TAP program. In the future, she would like to pursue a master’s degree.

Jeanne Petersen was a Caucasian female in her thirties who was employed in a childcare occupation. During the interview in her home, she was reserved but answered all of the questions in a straightforward manner. Her annual salary was under $30,000. She had a bachelor’s degree in home economics and planned to receive a bachelor’s in elementary education. She was in the PSU program. Jeanne felt that it was important to balance the needs of her career with her duties as wife and mother.

Anita Smith was a Caucasian, female in her forties earning under $30,000 as a part-time nurse. During the interview in her home, she was reflective but used few words to answer the questions. She had a bachelor’s degree in nursing and also one in general studies. She was in the PSU program and planned to earn a bachelor’s degree in elementary education. She was married with children.

James Swift was a single, Caucasian male in his twenties who worked part-time in a school setting. During the interview at UNO, he exhibited a great devotion to music. His annual salary was under $30,000. James described himself as an “over-
achiever.” He had a bachelor’s degree in music and planned to receive a master’s degree in music in the TAP program and a doctorate at a later date.

Mike Williams was a single, Caucasian male in his thirties who worked in a middle management position for a salary in the range of $30,000-50,000. During the interview at UNO, he was soft-spoken and gave short answers. He had a bachelor’s in journalism. He planned to receive a teaching certification in art while in the TAP program.

Demographics of the Participants

Age. The responses to the first question in the study, “What is your current age range?” showed an even distribution of the 15 participants. Five were in the under 29 years category; five were in the 30 to 39 years category; and five were in the 40 to 49 years range.

Employment. The second question asked, “How many years have you been in your current or last employment?” Nine of the participants had been employed one-to-five years; three respondents had been employed six-to-ten years; none had been employed in the 11-to-15 year range; and three had been employed 16-to-20 years.

Title and responsibilities. The third question asked, “What were your title and responsibilities?” There was a wide range of responses reflecting their wide range of occupations. Two of the respondents were in the insurance field; two were photojournalists, and the other eleven included: paraprofessional, lawyer, daycare provider, social work therapist, staff secretary, executive director, nurse, bank customer service worker, music teacher, salesperson, and food service manager. Of the 15 respondents,
four were in occupations related to education: paraeducator in a school; staff secretary at a teaching medical center; music teacher in a school; and food service manager for a university. Also, of the 15 respondents, only three had positions which could be defined as “managerial” in their current or last job: executive director of a non-profit organization; staff nurse; and food service manager.

**Salary.** The fourth question asked, “What was your annual salary?” With one respondent declining to answer, nine of the fifteen participants stated that they received annual salaries under $30,000. The remaining five reported annual salaries of over $30,000, one claiming a yearly salary exceeding $250,000 (see Table 2).

**Current or Past Job Information**

**Satisfactions.** The fifth question asked, “In your last job, what satisfactions, if any, did you experience?” Nine of the fifteen expressed job satisfaction due to interaction with other people. Of those, three worked with children and six worked with adult coworkers and/or customers. Cole Brunning, a food service manager, expressed satisfaction that “customers would come up and actually [say] ‘Thank you’ for nice service [and] good food.”

Five expressed satisfaction in their feeling of success in their job. Success was defined as task competency, success in sales performance, the ability to solve problems, or in their students’ mastery of skills.
Table 2

Demographics of Study Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years at Job</th>
<th>Job Title</th>
<th>Salary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colleen Alexander</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>1-5 years</td>
<td>Insurance auditor</td>
<td>30,000 or less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim Andrews</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>5 months</td>
<td>Bank worker</td>
<td>None given</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donna Bathgate</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>Salesperson</td>
<td>30,000 or less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynne Broderick</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>16-20 years</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>250,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob Callobero</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>16-20 years</td>
<td>Executive director</td>
<td>31,000-50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cole Brunning</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>1-5 years</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>31,000-50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Davis</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>1-5 years</td>
<td>Staff secretary</td>
<td>30,000 or less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann Gray</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>1-5 years</td>
<td>Paraprofessional</td>
<td>30,000 or less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill Jeffreys</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>1-5 years</td>
<td>Photojournalist</td>
<td>30,000 or less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia Lewin</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>1-5 years</td>
<td>Social worker</td>
<td>31,000-50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peggy O'Malley</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>1-5 years</td>
<td>Insurance worker</td>
<td>30,000 or less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeanne Petersen</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>Daycare provider</td>
<td>30,000 or less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anita Smith</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>16-20 years</td>
<td>Staff nurse</td>
<td>30,000 or less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Swift</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>1-5 years</td>
<td>Music teacher</td>
<td>30,000 or less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike Williams</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>Photojournalist</td>
<td>31,000-50,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ann Gray, a resource paraprofessional felt successful that some of the children I worked with are first through fifth grade. You see how little they’re able to do in first grade, and how much they’ve mastered by fifth grade. You really feel good that they’re so much more capable, and you feel more confident for them that they’ll be able to go on to junior high and do a good job.

The opportunity for creativity and the feeling of freedom were each mentioned twice as reasons for job satisfaction by participants. As Bill Jeffreys, a photojournalist, related,

I like, just the freedom, the opportunity to go out and meet people.
I mean, I got to go to all sorts of places, flying airplanes...covering fires, jumping on fire trucks as they took off, stuff...that people don’t get to do. And...it’s really exhilarating.

Frustrations. Question 6 asked, “In your last job, what frustrations, if any, did you experience?” Three participants mentioned lack of social interaction as a factor in their job dissatisfaction. As Kim Andrews, a customer service worker at a bank stated,

I was just sitting in a cubicle, and I had very little contact with other people. Someone would give me a task to do and it might take a few hours or a day or it could take a few days or a week to do it and just working like that didn’t get me much human interaction. So, it was really pretty dull on the whole, and I didn’t care for it too much.

Two mentioned being frustrated that the time constraints of the job curtailed
their ability to do their jobs well or to have enough time for their families. Two participants also mentioned being dissatisfied by their lack of office space.

**Pride.** In the seventh question, this query was posed, “In your last job, what, if anything, were you proud of?” Being able to help people was a factor listed by six of the participants. As Jeanne Petersen, a daycare provider stated, “I helped a boy learn to read. . . . He was struggling in school, so I just gave him a hand.”

Four of the participants were proud of the fact that they succeeded by learning new job skills. Three stated that they were proud of the fact that they persevered at the job and three were pleased by the recognition they received either by awards or by expressions of gratitude. As Georgia Lewin, a social work therapist, related, “I would say for the people we do help, just hearing them say ‘Thank you’ because we don’t often hear that . . .”

**Missing elements.** Question 8 asked, “In your last job, did you feel that anything was ‘missing’?” Only one person claimed that nothing was missing. The remaining 14 listed these responses:

- “training”
- “altruism”
- “authority” and “autonomy”
- “balanced view of negative and positive”
- “human side” and “learning for learning’s sake”
- “client initiative”
- “enjoyment of job”
Thirteen of the participants felt successful at their current or most recent job. And for the two who didn’t express a feeling of success, the concern was related to the definition of “success” rather than a feeling of incompetence. Lynne Broderick stated that, though she was “successful” by the world’s standards with a high income and prestige, she didn’t feel that the job allowed for true success which was, in her eyes, altruism. David Davis, a staff secretary at a university, didn’t feel that his job was important enough for him to feel that he was successful in accomplishing it.

**Job leaving.** Question 10 asked, “Did you resign or take sabbatical leave to pursue your career change?” Eight had resigned and seven had not resigned.

**Factors Influencing Decision to Enter Educational Fields**

**Highest degree.** In question 11, the participants were asked, “What is the highest degree that you have earned?” All of the participants had an undergraduate degree; four had master’s degrees, and two had doctoral level degrees.

The undergraduate degrees were held in these areas: music, journalism, home
economics, English, mathematics, law enforcement, nursing, and general studies. Two participants had undergraduate degrees in math; two had undergraduate degrees in journalism. One participant had both an undergraduate degree in general studies and an undergraduate degree in nursing. On the master’s level, two participants had master’s in counseling; one in fine arts; and one in music. The two doctoral level degrees were in law.

**Education coursework.** Question 12 asked, “Did you have any college coursework in the education department?” Twelve of the participants had taken no courses in education. Two had completed an educational psychology class and one had had an introduction to teaching class prior to enrollment in TAP or PSU.

**Reasons for non-educational career in the past.** Question 13 asked, “Why didn’t you pursue an educational career prior to this?” The respondents offered a variety of reasons. Six didn’t want a career in education at that time; four didn’t think of it; two didn’t think they would be competent as teachers; two didn’t want the additional coursework required for an educational degree and two didn’t think that he/she would be able to complete the undergraduate requirements. One of the respondent’s answers combined two of the responses already listed: “didn’t think of it” and “not confident of my ability as a teacher.”

**Reasons for educational career now.** Question 14 stated, “Describe your reasons for pursuing a degree in education now.” Eleven of the participants mentioned reasons relating to students. Five said that one reason was a desire to work with students in a school setting; five participants desired to make a difference in the lives of children;
one wanted to work with children, and one of the participants who mentioned having a
desire to make a difference in the lives of students also stated a desire to work with
students.

Other responses were not directly related to working with children. Two
participants stated that they now felt competent to teach. Two responded that they
would prefer the schedule that teaching offers— one stating that he/she looked forward to
having summers, most evenings and holidays off and the other indicating that he/she
expected to be home with his/her children more often. Other responses offered were
“money isn’t important now,” “I needed a change,” “[teaching] worked in with my life
now,” “great job, fun,” “challenging,” “has variety,” “the corporate environment’s not for
me,” “not doing same things all year round,” “help community to get jobs,” “I want to
teach in Japan,” “enjoy learning,” and “keeping up to date.”

Goals. Question 15 asked, “What goals do you have related to the decision to
pursue a degree at this time? Four planned on obtaining a master’s degree—two
wanted a master’s degree in music, one anticipated a master’s in mathematics and the
fourth planned on receiving a master’s in education. Of the 11 participants seeking a
bachelor’s degree, four desired one in elementary education, three desired in secondary
education, two in either elementary or middle school education, and two in either middle
school or high school education.

Level of Support

From family, friends, and co-workers. In response to this request, “Describe the
level of support you received from family, friends, and co-workers,” 13 respondents
indicated that they had received positive and a high level of support from those groups. One found support from friends but not from family members; another found support from co-workers and some family members but not all family members.

From university personnel. In answer to the following request, "Describe the level of support you received from university personnel," four of the participants reported some level of dissatisfaction.

Ann Gray stated:

I’m hoping to get a little more closely in contact with an advisor at UNO. I feel that’s been under-attended to, so that I have a better time frame of knowing when I could be done and what would be a good next course to take. I’d like a little bit more longer range planning.

Lynne Broderick felt that one of her instructors had "violated a confidence;” Anita Smith stated that she had received "not a whole lot” of support from university personnel but that she was new to the program; and David Davis recalled being discouraged in the first three weeks of classes due to failure to find courses he needed and not having advanced notice of room location changes.

Of the remaining 11 respondents, nine described the support as positive; one as "helpful but minimal;” and one rated it as "adequate."

In discussing the difficulties of being in the programs, even some of the participants who were satisfied with the level of support they received, were
dissatisfied with the length of time needed to complete the program and the fact that some of the mandatory classes were held during the day when they were employed at their jobs. Three participants expressed concern about loss of wages while in the certification programs.

Other Reasons for Pursuing an Educational Career at this Time

In response to question 18, “Are there any other reasons which encouraged you to pursue an educational degree at this time?,” three participants desired more time to “spend with family” and/or “enjoy house;” three reported being influenced by others; and two participants related that there were no other reasons. Georgia Lewin stated that “My sister is a teacher... She talks really highly of it.” Of the remaining seven participants, these responses were given: “TAP was what I needed and wanted;” “wanted to try something different;” “good time to get into education [to] help society;” “interested in and enjoy subject matter;” “personal reasons;” “[possible] life-long career;” and Colleen Alexander stated that she was drawn to education due to “my personal appreciation of the literature and the arts. I want to be closer to those things than in the business world.”

Perceived Difficulties in Pursuing an Educational Degree

When answering question 19, “What are the difficulties, if any, in pursuing a degree in education at this point?,” 11 of the 15 participants identified difficulties related to time such as maintaining a balance of school and job obligations or scheduling the required coursework. The remaining four respondents offered different ideas. Donna Bathgate expressed a concern over being with “younger competition” in the college
classroom. Kim Andrews was concerned “about kids who might have a behavioral
disorder or might cause problems in the classroom.” Bob Callobero anticipated difficulty
in “working with kids that have had a variety of challenges;” and Anita Smith anticipated
no difficulties “right now.”

Perceived Benefits of Pursuing an Educational Career

To question 20, “What are some benefits of pursuing an educational career at this
point in your life?,” three participants expected to have more time due to having summers
and holidays off. Three stated that interaction with other people was important to them.
Kim Andrews anticipated that

I will get to be with people, often, a lot. And I will be able to share
some of the things in the world that I am excited about with other
people. . . I think they can share things with me, too, and I will learn
more from the experience.

Three participants believed pursuing an educational career would enhance their self­
esteem.

Anticipated Lifestyle Changes as a Result of the Educational Career Decision

Question 21 asked, “What life changes, if any, will be necessary as a result of
your decision?” Five of the participants anticipated having more leisure time in an
educational career than in their current or most recent job. Donna Bathgate looked
forward to being a role model for her daughters, stating,

And so by [my] being able to go back to school and work . . . being able to
get a job in the schools. . . My girls, because women need to work, my girls
are going to see that mothers...can work...I think it's going to teach my
own children some really good values.

Three participants, Colleen Alexander, Kim Andrews and Lynne Broderick, expected to
travel more.

Three of the participants stated that they anticipated taking a decrease in income
as a result of their decision to enter an educational career. Peggy O'Malley was
concerned about insurance benefits as she planned to move out of her parents' home upon
graduation.

Two participants did not anticipate any lifestyle changes.

Family Members Currently or Formerly Employed in Education

The final question, "Are any of your family members associated with education
(either now or in the past)?" resulted in all but two of the respondents stating yes. Six
had a sister and/or sister-in-law who either currently was or had been a teacher. Five of
the participants had mothers and five others had aunts who either were teachers or
had been in the past.

Questionnaire Survey and Responses

From these responses, a questionnaire was created. The purpose of the
questionnaire was to determine if responses which had emerged in the interviews were
also present in the responses of the non-interviewed students.

The questionnaire was sent to all of the 23 students who were currently enrolled
in the TAP or PSU program, had agreed to be interviewed, but had not been selected.
Nine students responded. Of those, one indicated that he/she was moving and was no longer enrolled at UNO, and did not answer any of the questions on the survey. The remaining eight responded to all of the questions (see Table 3).

The results presented above indicate some recurring themes such participants’ reasons for not entering an educational career in the past and for entering the field of education now, and the presence of family members who are associated with educational employment either currently or in the past. A more detailed summary and a discussion of the findings will be presented in the next chapter.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Degree Desired</th>
<th>Reasons for Not Entering Education Before</th>
<th>Reasons for Entering Education Now</th>
<th>Number of Family Members Associated With Education</th>
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<td>34</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>Questioned ability to teach</td>
<td>Help society, autonomy, learn and grow, be a role model, summers/holidays off, challenge, influence of others</td>
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<td>BS</td>
<td>Didn’t think of it</td>
<td>Love of kids, autonomy, summers/holidays off</td>
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<td>37</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>Didn’t think of it</td>
<td>Love of kids, help society, autonomy, income increase, summers/holidays off, interaction with others, influence of others, challenge</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>Salary too low</td>
<td>Appreciation by others, be a role model, challenge</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Salary too low, influence of others, immediate job need</td>
<td>Love of kids, help society, learn and grow, be a role model, summers/holidays off, challenge</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>Not interested</td>
<td>Help society, challenge, learn and grow, appreciation by others, interaction with others, self esteem</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>Didn’t think of it</td>
<td>Challenge, influence of others</td>
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<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>Immediate job need</td>
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CHAPTER V

Summary and Discussion of the Findings

Introduction

In the next ten years, 2 million additional teachers will be needed in our nation’s schools (Fetler, 1997; “Who Should Teach?,” 2000). School administrators, college education departments, and state legislatures have tried different approaches to ensure that an adequate number of capable teachers are placed in the classrooms. Such options include raising the base salary, offering signing bonuses, mentoring new teachers, increasing the age of retirement, recruiting retired teachers to work part-time and providing alternative certification programs (Haselkorn, 1997).

Problem Statement

Currently, about 55% of the 72,000 students in alternative certification teaching programs came from careers from other fields (Farrell, 2000). In order to ascertain possible new teacher recruitment strategies that school administrators, college education departments, and state legislatures can employ or facilitate, this study explored why workers not currently employed in education decided to pursue a career in education.

Methodology Review

The Qualitative Research Paradigm

This study utilized qualitative research methodology. Qualitative research design encompasses descriptive rather than numerative results and, as such,
relies heavily on the verbal expression of participants and on the process of
exploration rather than on "proof." Rather than a quantitative gathering of data, the
focus is on an amassing of in-depth data, driven by the feelings, perceptions and
thought processes of participants. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe this as a "focus of
inquiry." This study's focus was the factors leading to the decisions of the participants to
enter the educational field.

Initial Exploration Approach

By collecting data from interviews and comparing the interview and field
notebook data with emerging categories (Creswell, 1994, p. 12), the researcher explored
reasons for persons deciding to enter the teaching profession at a non-traditional time.
Although the original intention of the study was to develop a substantive level theory
about factors in adults' decisions to enter educational careers, results provided initial
information only. The literature review was conducted following the data analysis to
determine if any existing theories in non-educational fields correlate to any "patterns"
(Lincoln & Guba, 1985) found in the participants' responses. For this type of research
design, Creswell recommends reviewing the literature after data analysis as "it becomes a
basis for comparing and contrasting findings of the qualitative study" (1994, p. 22-24).

Bounding the Study and Data Collection

The settings for the study were sites at participants' homes or my home and/or
sites at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, depending upon the convenience of the
participants and the availability of space. The informants in this study were the current
participants in the Teacher Academy Project and the Program for Special Undergraduates
at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Of the 106 participants who were sent letters, 38 agreed to participate in this study. From that group, I chose 15 study participants based on representation from the TAP and PSU programs, gender and age to be interviewed.

The demographic information on the participants is as follows: ten participants were from PSU and five were from TAP; nine were female and six were male; and five were under the age of 29, five were between the ages of 30 and 39, and five were 40 years or older. To the question of salary, nine respondents reported an annual salary of under $30,000; four stated that they earned $31,000-$50,000 each year; and one earned a yearly salary exceeding $250,000. One participant chose not to answer.

The research study participants were interviewed individually and allowed to describe their reasons for pursuing an educational career.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were maintained as I interviewed participants and analyzed the collected data. Prior to any activities related to the research, I informed potential participants of the purposes of the study; the confidentiality standards that would be employed; the data collection, analysis, and verification methods that would be utilized; and their rights as participants. I obtained written permission from the participants before proceeding. Participants' anonymity was upheld throughout the process. Their real names were not used and participant descriptives were written in the narrative so that no respondents could be identified.

All transcripts, tapes, and field notes were stored for audit.
I obtained Institutional Review Board approval.

At no time during the research process, did I receive funding from an institution involved in the TAP and PSU programs. The only exception to this would be the $1,000 UNO scholarship that I received for Summer 2000 tuition.

Data Collection Strategies

I sent a letter to potential participants and scheduled face-to-face interviews of voluntary study participants for the months of August and September of 2000. Each interview was approximately one hour and included identical questions as well as varied follow-up questions as needed. Each interview was tape-recorded and transcribed. I encoded the data and sent a copy of the encoding to the participant for that interview. I enclosed a self-addressed, stamped postal card on which the participant wrote his or her confirmation of accuracy or corrections and returned the card to me. All participants responded either through the mail or by phone, and I corrected the data as needed.

I kept a field notebook of my impressions of the participants.

Data Analysis Procedures

Creswell (1994) states that data collection and analysis should occur simultaneously. This was particularly true in this research study as I was having the interviews transcribed and encoding responses by categories at the same time as I was conducting interviews with the remainder of the participants. During the interview stage of the data collection process, I also recorded my impressions in my field notebook. These activities allowed me to reflect on the data and helped me in my analysis of the information. I used Glaser and Strauss’s (1967) constant comparative method of data
analysis. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) state that “this method provides the beginning researcher with a clear path for engaging in analysis of substantial amounts of data in a way that is both challenging and illuminating” (p. 127). Using this method, I compared each new “unit of meaning” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) with all other collected units of meaning to add to existing categories or to form new ones. As I collected the data, some categories emerged; others failed to develop. As I continued interviewing participants, I began coding the emerging categories from the completed interviews. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that the coding should begin as soon as the data is collected. This open coding process is also recommended by Strauss and Corbin (1990) and Runge (1997). Runge gave this example:

Open coding is dynamic and iterative in nature. Very little structuring was done a priori. A very shallow structure of initial categories was first set up based on research questions and expected themes. This early structure then evolved as the actual themes developed in the data. . . The data was thus coded and recorded several times (p. 8).

After all of the data had been analyzed, I reviewed the literature to determine if common themes found in the data compared or contrasted with current research. From this data analysis, commonalities emerged.

Verification

In order to ensure internal validity, I utilized triangulation of data collection by interviewing and keeping a field notebook; reviewing literature about career cycle theories; and gathering member checks of my interpretations. I offered each participant
the opportunity to read the transcript encoding analysis of his/her interview. All of the participants responded by reading the transcript for his/her interview. He/she evaluated the accuracy of my reporting and analysis to ensure the trustworthiness of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Of the 15 participants, 12 stated that the encoding was correct; three offered additions or corrections. I made the additions and corrections as stated.

From those results, I designed a questionnaire which utilized common responses of interviewed participants. The purpose of the questionnaire was to determine how the responses of the study participants compared to those of students who were also enrolled in the TAP and PSU programs but who had not been selected to be interviewed for the study. The questionnaire was sent to all of those 38 students. Nine responded. Of those, one did not answer any questions on the questionnaire survey sheet because of the fact that he/she was leaving the program.

Eight students completed the questionnaire survey sheet. Their responses and the responses made by the interviewed participants indicated common reasons for not entering education in the past and for entering education now. Also, many of the respondents both in the survey group and those of the interviewed group indicated the presence of family members associated with educational careers either currently or in the past (see Figures 1, 2, and 3).
FIGURE 1

Comparison of Reasons for Not Entering Education in the Past

Interview Responses of Fifteen Participants

Reason

Questionnaire Responses of Eight Participants

Reason

(Respondents may answer more than one response)
FIGURE 2

Comparisons of Reasons for Entering Education Now

Interview Responses of Fifteen Participants

Questionnaire Responses of Eight Participants

(Respondents may answer more than one response)
Figure 3

Comparison of Number of Family Members Associated with Education

Interview Responses of Fifteen Participants

Case Number

Number of Family Members

0  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10

Questionnaire Responses of Eight Participants

Case Number

Number of Family Members

0  1  2  3  4  5  6

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For external validity, I realize that the findings will be generalizable only to a limited degree. Many factors will influence how generalizable the participants’ perceptions and experiences are in comparison to those participants in other alternative certification programs in the country. In this metropolitan area, there is low unemployment; many school districts in which to apply for teaching jobs; and a history of relatively calm, supportive relations between the community and the schools. These factors could influence the generalizability of the findings.

Furthermore, only students currently enrolled in the educational department of the university were involved in the study. There are two other groups of potential study participants who might have provided invaluable information—current employees in non-educational fields who have chosen not to change careers and current students in other departments within the university setting who have chosen to change careers but have not chosen to enter an educational field as a new career.

Before the dissertation was presented to my committee, an outside auditor agreed to review my dissertation. This person has her doctoral degree and was unknown to me prior to the auditing process. I gave her a copy of the dissertation, the participants’ agreement letters, audiotapes of the interviews, transcripts of the interviews, the written questionnaire responses, my field notes, participant encoding verification documentation and analysis records in order to verify the valid methodology of data collection and analysis. She worked on the audit for approximately one month. The auditor’s analysis is included in Appendix E.
Reporting the Findings

This is a naturalistic study. I am reporting the findings in a narrative format. Descriptions of participants, their perceptions and experiences as well as my own perceptions of the discussions are included in this narrative in order to provide a rich data display.

As a result of this study, educators will understand the factors that influenced participants to decide upon a career in education and if those factors relate to current career cycle theories. Educators may gain insight into successful recruitment of potential teachers from non-educational settings.

Summary and Discussion of Findings

Salary Demographics of Participants

Even though the participants were evenly divided among these three age ranges: under 29, 30-39, and 40-49, it is interesting to note that nine of the participants reported current or most recent job salaries of under $30,000. Nine of the study participants reported working for only one to five years. Six of those nine made salaries under $30,000; two made from $31,000 to $50,000; and one of the nine made a salary in the $51,000 and higher range.

While higher salaries often is advanced as one of the remedies for the teacher shortage (Irby & Brown, undated; Darling-Hammond, 1996; Gursky, 2000/2001; Obermier, 2001), most of these respondents, regardless of current salary, did not express an interest in earning more money. Only two respondents expected higher salaries; three actually anticipated decreases.
Colleen Alexander described her feelings about the business world:

It can be really a frustrating world. It creates a negative environment, and that alone probably had more influence than the nature of the work itself. The business world, it’s just a different environment than education... the challenge is more monetary, not so much education for education’s sake. You learn so you can make more money, and I’m not that interested in that.

Lynne Broderick, who earns over $250,000 annually, concurred: “I don’t know what it’s going to be like to not be earning this much money, but earning this much money isn’t necessarily the same as [being] successful.”

Money, however, did seem to influence some of their families’ feelings. Two participants decided to enter teaching in spite of family objections. Peggy O’Malley stated “the family [is] not so supportive because of the issue of income” and Anita Smith related that her husband said, “You’re not going to make any money at this.”

Only two respondents expected higher salary; three actually anticipated decreases. This seeming disinterest in salary could be due to the fact that all of the study participants had already chosen employment in an educational field which is traditionally a lower-paying profession. Having made that commitment, they may feel a pressure to remain consistent to it (Feistritzer, 1994). Others who may have rejected a career in education because of the low salary scale would not have been interviewed or surveyed for this study.
The study participants' disinterest in salaries also may be a result of an acceptance of reality since Nebraska's teachers' salaries rank forty-fourth in the nation (Obermier, 2001). In fact, Nebraska teachers earn an average annual salary of $33,473 which is lowest even when compared to its surrounding states. Colorado teachers earn $38,827, Kansas teachers earn $38,527, Iowa teachers earn $35,791, Missouri teachers earn $35,556, and Wyoming teachers earn $34,300 ("Nebraska's Teacher Salaries Lose Ground Again," 2001). Efforts are being made in the Nebraska Unicameral to increase teachers' salaries in order to recruit new teachers and to thereafter retain them. A legislative task force recommended higher teacher salaries in Nebraska ("Who Will Teach?,” 2001).

It might not matter too much, however, even if Nebraska's salaries ranked higher. Nationally, teacher salaries are lower than comparable salaries in other fields. For example, an average beginning teacher's salary in 1999 was $26,639; for college graduates overall, however, the average beginning salary was $37,194. The average teacher has worked sixteen years and earns $40,574; yet other employees with a similar number of years on the job earn more. Engineers earn $68,294, computer systems analysts earn $66,782, and accountants receive $49,247 (Gursky, 2000/2001).

Despite this financial gap, however, the real issue may not be money at all. A study by the National Center for Education Statistics ("Job Satisfaction," 1997) reports a weak correlation between teacher job satisfaction and salaries and benefits. To retain teachers, it appears, incentives also need to offer improved working conditions and an enhanced sense of professionalism (Gursky, 2000/2001). This is reflected in the
responses of the study participants who, though not indicating a high interest in salary, indicated an expectation of enhanced working conditions and interpersonal relationships in their new teaching assignments.

**Anticipated Benefits in Teaching**

In addition to information gained in taking college coursework, preservice teachers bring to their profession their own belief systems. These belief systems may affect how they will perform during student teaching (Crow, 1987; Holt-Reynolds, 1992) and may also influence their effectiveness as teachers (Goodman, 1988).

Unfortunately, many preservice teachers' preconceptions may not be based in reality. Preservice teachers who have had positive student teaching experiences might be unrealistically optimistic about their chances of becoming successful teachers (Book, Byers, & Freeman, 1983). Unrealistic optimism exists in some potential teachers because of an egocentric belief system that they will succeed though others may fail (Goodman, 1988).

As I interviewed the participants, I found that some of them had expectations that might prove to be unrealistic. Some expected to have increased interaction with others, more time to spend with family and leisure pursuits, or an opportunity to make the world a better place. As Kim Andrews put it:

I will get to be with people... interaction, and I like to think about things, and I hope the students do, too, so I'd like to kind of motivate them to think about things in different ways. I think it'll be fun.

Georgia Lewin anticipated "less stress because I'll have more time" and Bill Jeffreys...
expected that "the kids will appreciate what you are doing... and come back twenty years later and say, 'Mr [Jeffreys], I'm glad you did this' and just to see the end result that you helped form."

In light of their expectations, it is worth a moment to examine the research to determine if the anticipated benefits as stated in this study are based in reality.

**Decreased isolation as an anticipated benefit.** Nine of the participants stated that isolation was a source of frustration for them in their current or last jobs or that they anticipated a reduction of isolation in their teaching careers. When asked, "What are some of the benefits in pursuing an educational career at this point in your life?", James Swift mentioned "help me understand people" and Donna Bathgate talked about anticipated benefit of "people contact" and "being part of a bigger group."

Colleen Alexander expressed a desire to be part of a community:

[B]eing in the educational environment you are maybe exposed to things that being in the rest of the world you don’t know about, like plays or performed things and sporting events for your school. Things you would normally get involved with, so I think that the community of the school system, that would be a life change.

However, community doesn't automatically happen in all schools. The expectation that teaching will offer decreased isolation isn't always realistic. DePaul (1998) reports that beginning teachers may also find isolation in their first year of teaching. One fifth grade teacher related that in her first year of teaching she was "surprised how isolated some teachers are" (p. 17). "I felt alone," another first year
teacher in a high school said. "It was my challenge, my work. There was no one else to help me meet a whole array of new challenges. I had to meet them myself" (p.17).

Remembering her first year, a first grade teacher echoed these remarks when she stated, "We are limiting ourselves by not being able to learn from each other" (p.17).

A male teacher who was in his first year in a high school, related:

My first year of teaching had some horrible moments. I was the youngest on the staff by 15 years, a man in a school with a staff that was 90% women, and everyone else was over 50 years old.

I was new on the faculty, and I was also working as an administrator.

My colleagues called me names, they couldn't believe a man my age had authority in the school. It was a complete surprise. In this school all the teachers had 20-plus years experience teaching. I didn't go through that system, so the teachers resented it (DePaul, 1998. p.10).

Sometimes the isolation is so severe that it cannot be endured. Halford (1998) cites a first year teacher's frustrations that culminated in her resigning:

Nothing in her teacher preparation program, including her one-year internship at another school, had prepared Julia for the isolation she would experience during her first month at Whitman. As a new teacher in a probationary period, Julia was concerned that seeking assistance for her classroom problems would be viewed as a sign of incompetence. She also began to question whether her colleagues shared her philosophy of teaching and learning and this compounded...
her concerns. As the school year wore on, Julia wore out. Teaching left her with feelings of disillusionment and failure, shattering her idealism. By June, Julia decided to leave teaching and pursue another career (p. 33).

Indeed, in spite of some school administrators’ efforts to implement mentoring, staff development and team teaching programs, “burned out colleagues and staff morale” were the fourth and fifth ranked frustrations cited by American teachers in a recent Scholastic Inc. survey (Omaha, 2000, 2000, p. 20). And the National Center for Education Statistics reports that while 63% of the public school teachers may describe relatively strong support from their colleagues (“Teacher Quality,” 1999), only one-third perceive strong support from the parents of their students. The participants who anticipated affirmation from the community may be sadly disappointed.

There is another interesting dimension to this question. While many of the participants in this study anticipated enhanced interaction with peers, none of them expressed frustration with their current co-workers. In fact, even though some of the participants reported that their families or university personnel were not supportive, none of them reported that their co-workers were unsupportive. In light of school research, it may be unrealistic for these preservice teachers to anticipate enhanced interaction with peers in real school settings. Even in the unlikely event that it is more frequent, colleague interaction may not be any more positive or supportive than where they now work.

Increased time as an anticipated benefit. Another job frustration, lack of time, was also cited by participants in other interview questions. Responses included the desire
to spend more time with their families, to have more time for travel, and to have summers and holidays off.

Ten respondents mentioned lack of time as being a problem in their current job and/or being resolved in their future teaching job. This expectation was stated by members of all age categories. As an example, Ann Gray stated, "...I like the fact that being in education will give me more time with my family in terms of the hours that are required than a career in business would."

The expectation that they will have more time as teachers may be unrealistic. Teachers work longer hours than many people think. De Paul (1998) states that on average, teachers work on teaching related tasks 10-15 hours a week in addition to their contracted time.

Darling-Hammon concurs, stating that as a teacher

[y]ou spend roughly 12 hours each week correcting papers, because you believe your students should write a theme each week. You feel guilty that this allows you to spend only five minutes per paper. You spend another six hours each week preparing for your five different sections, mostly writing up the behavioral objectives required by the system’s curriculum guide, which you find meaningless and even counter-productive to your goals for your students. You do all of this after school hours, because your one preparation period is devoted to preparing attendance forms, doing other administrative paper work and meeting with students who need extra help. Between classes,
you monitor hallways and restrooms, supervise the lunch room and track down truants (1984, p.12).

In fact, there is evidence that teachers in the United States have a heavier workload than those in European countries since American teachers have shorter periods of planning time for grading papers and class preparation than do their European counterparts (Shollenberger & Swaim, 1999).

Thus the participants’ expectations that they will have more family and leisure time than they have had in their current employment, isn’t borne out in the research. There are many factors to consider, such as the time demands of their current employment/college coursework, work load expectations of the school district in which they will be employed, available support systems in their school such as paraeducators and clerical staff to help alleviate the workload, and the participants’ own work ethics.

Increased altruism as an anticipated benefit. The final job frustration-lack of altruism- was repeated in other questions regarding missing elements of the current job, reasons for pursuing education, and anticipated benefits of education. Ten respondents wanted to help students or to improve the community and/or the world. Cole Brunning stated that he would be doing “what I should be doing” and Lynne Broderick disdained the “emphasis on money” and the lack of “working for the greater good” in her current job.

Schein (1978) contends that career paths follow age-related life patterns and that workers experience a “mid-career” crisis similar to a “mid-life” crisis. Schein believes that this career change period can be one of phenomenal growth in that it can be the
catalyst for the worker to pursue other personal values. Lynne Broderick and Bob Callobero described feelings of disillusionment with their present employment which led them to forego lucrative careers for teaching. Lynne Broderick put it this way:

I felt pretty strongly that I wasn’t connected with... oh, when
I was in college I wanted to right the wrongs of the down-trodden masses. I don’t know how to describe that... I really missed being connected with doing anything that’s for the greater good... I like to think that I’ll make a difference, somehow, by showing... them, and I know this is pie-in-the-sky, but you know I have kind of dreams, [I] visualize going to class saying, ‘Guess what? Being here is more important than earning $250,000 a year.’

Bob Callobero expressed a similar desire to leave a career which he described as “increasingly administrative... [with less] contact with people and focusing on budgets or bookkeeping.” As a teacher, he could make “a connection again,” he said,

between the elementary schools... and parents. There’s just a tremendous disconnect between our elementary schools in North Omaha and parents. They [the parents] think the teachers don’t care, and the teachers think the parents don’t care. The only time the parents see the teachers for the most part is when the kids are in trouble. The school isn’t the center of the community anymore,
and I want to change that, at least in my own classroom. . . visit parents
when there aren’t any problems, just to get to know them and try to
get the parents involved in the students’ education.

All five of the participants in the 40-49 age range would take a salary cut to
enter the teaching field. Four of them gave altruistic reasons. Lynne Broderick, who is
leaving a career with a salary exceeding $250,000 said that, “Money is not important to
me.” Donna Bathgate related, “I’m going to feel that I’m giving back to the community.
Being part of a bigger group.” Ann Gray said, “I feel that I can be successful and I can
be helpful to the kids.”

Bob Callobero explained his feelings in this way:

…it’s pretty clear, I guess, to me, that in order for there to be
genuine community development there need to be more jobs
and there need to be people prepared for them with good educa-
tions. . . . If a person has a good education and is able to get a good
job, [he/she] will meet [his/her] own needs. So I guess I don’t think
there’s anything more important than helping children get off to a
good start. And seeing how poorly our children in North Omaha do in
school has really been a concern for me for some time, and I think
I can connect with the kids and help with that.

This altruism reflects a national trend of highly paid professionals who are
entering the field of education at a point in their mid-career. A participant in another
alternative certification program, a former attorney, stated, “I found that I really
wanted to spend more time with kids” (“A Mid-Career Changer,” 2001). This sentiment was echoed by a former sales manager who took an annual salary decrease of $20,000 in order to teach and stated,

At this point in my life, salary is not as important to me as what I’m doing. You only pass this way so many times. But you can try to leave a mark in the sand, and if you do, someone may possibly follow (Farrell, 2000).

In spite of the warnings of others and even their own knowledge that classroom discipline could be difficult, the participants still chose to enter the teaching profession. Their determination to make a positive difference in the lives of their students over-rode their fears.

Education administrators need to recognize the attraction of altruism when recruiting teachers from the ranks of mid-career professionals. Allan Frederickson, a recruiter of new employees for businesses, believes that education needs to “capitalize on its built in advantage over some jobs” but also needs to address the fears of teachers that may offset the advantage of altruism (Goodsell, 2001).

**Anticipated Problem in Classroom Management**

Many people who view education as a worthwhile career are deterred by feeling that they may not be able to control their classes (DePaul, 1998; Goodsell, 2001). This fear of inability to control classrooms was also mentioned by three of the participants in this study, and in fact had delayed Ann Gray’s and Colleen Alexander’s entry into the field. Gray remembered that she had initially been “intimidated by kids,” and Alexander stated that she had not been “confident of [my] presence in the
classroom.” Kim Andrews expressed concern about being able to establish a classroom conducive to learning, stating:

...among the local people in general there's kind of a feeling of the schools having big problems. Maybe they have problems internally, or maybe they have a lot of kids who cause problems. Right now is a difficult time, I think, for teachers in particular. I am personally a little bit worried about kids who might have a behavioral disorder or might cause problems in the classroom. So discipline is something that I don't look forward to dealing with.

These feelings show up in a number of research studies. For example, De Paul (1998) verifies that the fears are legitimate when he quotes a first year high school teachers' experience:

I pictured an idyllic classroom, students busily scratching away at original poetry, analytical discussions of Herman Hesse and Sylvia Plath, debates which lasted far after the bell rang. I should have supposed from my interview at Hunters Lane [High School] that my experience might not match my expectations. The position available was in a room where two tenured teachers had already quit, and the students had tried to superglue their last sub to his desk. In a way, I was luckier than I knew to have had such a challenge. I wouldn't have been the first teacher to fail in that classroom. I began teaching with the idea that if I was terrible at it, no one would
know. There was no pressure. I spoke to my students as I had hoped my teachers would have spoken to me when I was in high school. I did the types of activities that kept me interested, that I found enjoyable . . . Turns out, my students enjoyed it, too. I have lost and found hope, reviewed and revised, and finally concluded that my presence here is much more important than I had thought it would be (p. 23).

Peggy O’Malley described the reactions of her co-workers upon learning that she was going to become a teacher, especially a middle school teacher. “Why do you want to teach?” and “Are you crazy?” were two comments she received. Yet her friends ultimately supported her efforts. James Swift’s mother, a teacher, expressed concern that he wouldn’t be able to maintain order but he felt confident that he could.

Factors Relating to Generation Xers’ Decisions to Enter Teaching

One-third of the participants in the study were in the 18 to 29 year age range which has been called Generation X (Levine, 1994, p. 87). Many, if not most, Generation Xers do not consider it important to be loyal to a company, having seen many of their parents lose their jobs during the economic hardships of the 1970’s (Conger, 1998). The Generation X population tends to value job expertise, rather than loyalty to a company, as a way to ensure job security.

Some of the Generation X participants in this study contended that their entrance into the field of education will enhance their ability to understand people and also enable them to continue learning and keep “up to date.” These beliefs reflect the value Generation X members place on skill learning rather than on company loyalty.
Many, perhaps most, Generation Xers will stay with a company only as long as the company is teaching them and improving their job skills (Conger, 1998). Career cycles are no longer predominantly linear for any age group of workers and Generation Xers may be looking for newer career horizons (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988; Hall & Mirvis, 1995). The participants in this study reflected the career motivations of their Generation X population nationally. While most of the over-40 age range participants mentioned altruistic reasons for entering education, Generation X participants tended to cite self-enhancement reasons such as enjoyment, improved interpersonal skills, personal interests, and prestige.

Yet, Generation X employees may be open to a career in education. A recent Public Agenda study of college graduates under the age of 30 found that 80% of the participants viewed teaching as more beneficial to society than their current job and 68% stated that they would consider teaching (“Concern Two,” 2000).

Another recurring theme among Generation X participants was the desire for control over their time and tasks. Jeanne Peterson didn’t want to be “tied down all day” and Bill Jeffreys, dissatisfied with his perceived level of trust by supervisors, said, “I like being able to control as much as I can.” Having authority and autonomy were also important to James Swift. Generation X workers are noted for desiring autonomy and aren’t interested in being part of an authoritarian organization (Conger, 1998). Many employers have responded by giving Generation X employees as much freedom and autonomy as feasible (Losyk, 1997).
However, this need for autonomy might not be met in a classroom. Research into reasons people leave teaching doesn't support an expectation of autonomy. In one study, seven of the top 12 reasons teachers resigned were related to autonomy: "inadequate support from administration," "lack of recognition and support from administration," "lack of influence over school policies and practices," "intrusions on teaching time," "poor opportunity for professional advancement," "inadequate time to prepare lesson plans," and "lack of resources and materials" (Omaha, 2000, 2000, p. 21). Some of the study participants' anticipations of gaining greater authority and autonomy as teachers may be unrealistic.

**Perceived Level of Support from Family Members**

Families influence career decisions to a major degree (Otto and Call, 1985; Grinstad & Way, 1993). Most of the participants in this study reported a level of support that was at least satisfactory. Only two respondents felt that family members were unsupportive. This high level of support might have been influenced by the fact that thirteen of the fifteen participants had family members who were currently or who previously had been teachers. The presence of teachers in the family can be a significant factor in choices that children make in their career planning (Marso & Pigge, 1994). This was reflected in the responses of Bill Jeffreys and James Swift.

Bill Jeffreys had a mother and two uncles who were teachers. He was initially concerned about their acceptance of his career change since he had won numerous journalism awards and was successful in his job. He remembered, "I was worried about
telling them, thinking that they might be disappointed in me. And they’re like, ‘No. It’s better if you’re happy now and you have the energy to do it now.’"

James Swift also recalled his family’s support:

Education runs in my family, on both sides of my family. My father’s sister has been principal of an elementary school … for years and years and on my mom’s side of the family there are numerous—she has about ten siblings and I say about half of those are involved in the educational profession. So this wasn’t like stepping into something totally new and unfamiliar. They understood, too, what I was going through.

Unanticipated Findings

As I worked on this dissertation, I was struck by three recurring impressions. Each was unanticipated but I found that each was consistent with the research. The first impression was that the participants of Generation X had reasons for entering education different from those the participants of the Baby Boomer generation had. The second impression was that salary concerns were not a significant factor in the participants’ responses. The third impression was that the participants had some unrealistic expectations of the teaching profession.

Differing reasons for entering education based on age range. The first impression involved the difference between the motivations of the participants who were Generation Xers and the motivations of the participants who were Baby Boomers. Even though I had read about the pragmatic Generation X, I had expected that, since beginning teachers’ salaries are so low, anyone entering education would have some altruistic motivations. I
discovered, however, that the Generation X respondents in this study had myriad 
reasons for entering the teaching profession and most of the reasons centered on their 
own needs. Kim Andrews anticipated making new friends and having fun, and Colleen 
Alexander thought she’d have more opportunities to travel. In fact, while most of the 
participants in the over-40 age range mentioned altruistic reasons for entering education, 
few of the under-30 age range did. This was a bit disheartening to me because I have 
always viewed education as a “calling,” not just a job.

My impression of the Generation X participants I interviewed was that they 
would do a competent job as teachers but that they might not stay in teaching as a life-
long career.

When I reflected upon this, I realized that it is understandable that the Baby Boom 
generation would enter education for more altruistic reasons than the Generation X 
generation. Baby Boomers are in a more financially secure stage of life, have more 
financial resources with which to pursue educational employment and, thus, can enter 
the teaching profession for altruistic reasons which the Generation X cannot.

Lack of salary discussion by participants. My next unanticipated finding was the 
lack of salary discussion by the study participants. Since Nebraska’s teachers receive 
such low salaries in comparison with the rest of the nation, I had expected some of the 
participants to mention the struggle they had in deciding to enter the teaching profession. 
Even participants who were facing a drastic salary decrease seemed to view it in a 
positive light. They took pride in the fact that money wasn’t important to them and they 
looked forward to working for “the common good.”
Those participants who were earning $30,000 or less anticipated higher wages than they currently received. They probably did not mention salary considerations because they anticipated either maintaining or increasing their current salaries.

Of course, the study involved only participants who had decided to enter education. Others who had chosen a different profession would not have been interviewed. For them, salary considerations might have been a significant factor in not choosing to pursue a career in teaching.

Unrealistic expectations of some participants. Finally, I was struck by some of the expectations which the participants had regarding time, autonomy, and altruistic opportunities.

Regardless of age, they anticipated having more time when they became teachers. The research doesn’t bear this out. But I kept hearing “summers and holidays off” in my interviews and was forced to accept the fact that they anticipated more free time as teachers than they have in their current employment. Interestingly enough, even participants who had family members in education still anticipated more free time. I thought they would have had a more realistic concept of the time constraints on a teacher during the school year and during summers when the teacher is taking courses or planning for the following year.

Nor does research suggest that teachers have the autonomy that many of the younger participants expected they would have as teachers. It’s been my experience that teaching is rarely the self-contained (and controlled) domain of one teacher. With special area teachers, team teaching, collaborative staff development and involved parents, the
teacher is bound to be accountable to many people.

The final expectation was altruistic in nature. Although this factor has been placed in the study with the unrealistic expectations of more time and autonomy, I found that most of the participants did recognize some of the common problems facing teachers today, but they decided that, for them, it was going to be different. They would overcome the problems because of their commitment to improving the world, one child at a time.

**Recommendations**

**Provide Support without Lessening Necessary Requirements**

University administrators wishing to recruit and retain alternative certification participants might examine the level of support available for their programs. Such factors as guiding students on long range planning and notifying them of schedule or classroom changes might be feasible especially with the availability of e-mail for conferencing and websites for posting information. In discussing difficulties of being in the programs, even some of the participants who were satisfied with the level of support they received were dissatisfied with length of time needed to complete the program and the fact that some of the mandatory classes were held during the day when they were working at their jobs. Darling-Hammond (1984) however, cautions against lessening requirements for teacher certification. She encourages even more rigorous teacher training standards, stating:

Upgrading the quality of teacher preparation and creating more professional working conditions are part of a structural solution, one that
attends to the interrelated cause of the problem rather than merely to its symptoms. In fact, teaching is now much like the legal and medical professions were at the turn of the century. Until fundamental changes were made in the structure of these professions, they, too, were characterized by low wages, easy access, poor training, no real standards of practice and a poor public image (p. 16-17).

Darling-Hammond recommends rigorous entry requirements and supervised induction of new teachers as two features of her restructuring plan. In our attempts to alleviate the teacher shortage by implementing alternative certification programs, we must be careful to implement the necessary teacher education components to ensure that the new teacher has the necessary skills to be successful in the classroom; however, it also important to provide the guidance and mentoring that the education major needs to complete the alternative certification program.

Explore Differing Motivations for Entering Educational Careers

The motivations for entering education at different ages needs to be explored. Some of the Generation X population may enter the teaching profession due to altruistic motivations but others in that age range are apt to enter careers based on motivations that are pragmatic. There is a population of employees in the 40-50 year age range which could be drawn to the teaching profession. They are at a stage in their career cycles which encourages selecting careers based on altruistic motivations. Teaching would afford them many opportunities to work for the greater good. Alternative certification programs should be open to these diverse motivations.
Areas for Further Research

Comparison Study of Career Life Cycles Based on Type of Career

One of the areas for further research would be a comparison study of the career life cycles of non-educationally employed persons and the career life cycles of teachers. Huberman (1989, 1998) and Sikes, Measor, and Woods (1985) discuss teachers’ life cycles in the following stages: the entry stage (ages 22-24); the stabilizing stage (ages 25-30); the encounter stage (ages 31-39); the plateau stage (ages 40-55); and the retirement stage (ages 56-65). The National Center for Education Statistics ("Job Satisfaction," 1997) compared the job satisfaction of younger teachers with that of older teachers and found that the younger teachers were more satisfied with teaching than were the older teachers. By exploring these stages and comparing them to those cycles of non-educationally careered persons, education leaders may be able to better understand the career cycles of teachers.

Comparison Study of Career Life Cycles Based on Gender

Further study might be made of the role of gender in career life cycles. Of the 15 participants, four of the nine women were entering the educational field in a later stage of life- between the ages of 40-49; only one of the six men was doing so. Carol Gilligan (Eastmond, 1991) points out the need for considering the traditional role of women in family responsibilities and how that role might influence the employment cycles of women. She states that women’s lives are based more on relationships than men’s are and as such, are less linear. It could be profitable to examine the unique qualities that gender brings to career path cycles (Forrest & Mikolaitis, 1986).
Lea and Leibowitz (1992) concur that women's career paths are "entangled" with family duties, role conflict, harassment and gender stereotypes. It is interesting to note that of the nine female and six male participants, the four participants who expressed a desire to have more family time were all women. One male participant related that his employment would provide the family with enough income so that his wife could quit working and stay home.

I also found it interesting to note that the great majority of 106 potential participants in this study were female. Seventy-five percent of the PSU persons were female and 25% were male; 73% of the TAP persons were female and 27% were male. Since research suggests that male elementary teaching candidates are more influenced by male teachers than by female teachers when deciding to enter the teaching profession, it isn't surprising that male teachers aren't predominant in the elementary schools (Klecker & Loadman, 1999). Research on why males enter the teaching profession and what factors affect their retention needs to be done. Brookhart and Loadman's 1996 study of female elementary, male elementary, female secondary, and male secondary teachers found that male elementary teachers were the most dissatisfied of the four groups. Further research to explore reasons for this dissatisfaction would be helpful.

**Study of Family Influence upon Decisions to Enter Teaching**

In this study, 13 of the participants had family members in the educational field. It would helpful to determine if family members influence decisions to enter the field of education. If so, it would be useful to explore if the influence had a negative or
positive effect.

As a graduate of an alternative Master’s in Education Program in Florida, states

Growing up as a child, I watched my mother and how she made a difference. Even after she died, her students would come back and say, ‘I still remember her.’ I wanted to make that difference, too (Farrell, 2000).

Further Study of Current Participants

I interviewed current participants of the university’s programs but it would be useful to interview these participants once or twice a year for the next five years to ascertain if they stayed in their teaching career or if they left it. Reasons for both of these decisions could be helpful for school administrators in order to provide the support that is needed to retain teachers.

Summary

This study attempted to answer the question “Why did participants in non-educational careers decide to enter the teaching profession?” Fifteen University of Nebraska at Omaha education majors who were enrolled either in the TAP or PSU programs were interviewed to ascertain their reasons for leaving employment in non-educational fields in order to become teachers. The purpose of the study was to ascertain if there were common reasons for pursuing an educational career at this time.

Study participants’ responses revealed some recurring themes. These themes
were related to salary, unrealistic expectations, realistic concerns, age-related motivations for career choices, and the presence of family members who were educators.

Current popular opinion suggests that the teacher shortage problem can be alleviated by raising teachers’ salaries. This study, however, indicated that salary wasn’t a significant factor in the participants’ decisions to enter teaching.

The study also revealed some unrealistic expectations held by some of the participants. The expectations that teaching would provide increased opportunities for social interaction and more time for family and leisure pursuits were not supported by current research.

Research does, however, support the realistic concerns of some of the participants regarding classroom management. Although the participants exhibited a knowledge of common problems in today’s classrooms, they also believed that they would be able to overcome these problems and create a positive classroom climate.

Special characteristics of the Generation X employees were explored. The Generation X population has been characterized as being interested in autonomy, choosing employment that will improve job skills, and in wanting social interaction in the workplace. These characteristics were reflected in the findings of this study.

Particular attention was also given to the professionals in the 40-49 age range who have achieved economic success but are searching for an occupation which would benefit society. Such members of this population could be strong candidates for alternative certification programs. The participants in this study in the 40-49 age range also displayed altruistic motivations in their choice to enter the teaching profession.
Finally, the study showed that most of the participants had family members who were currently teachers or had been teachers in the past. The study didn’t examine the level of influence exerted by family members upon the participants’ career choice for education.

By exploring different factors influencing the decision to enter the educational field, school administrators, college department chairpersons, and state legislators involved in alternative certification programs may discover more effective methods of recruiting and retaining teachers from non-educational fields, which may be one step toward easing the teacher shortage.
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Appendix A

August 2000

Dear Student,

I am working on my doctoral degree at UNO in the area of Educational Administration. My dissertation research topic is a study of the reasons for adults’ decisions to enter the educational field. The study will add to the base of knowledge about the teacher shortage and about ways in which to alleviate the problem because it will examine reasons for entering educational fields. That information may be used by university program directors and school administrators to recruit and retain new teachers.

I would appreciate your participation in the study. Your involvement would entail being interviewed by me at a time and location of your convenience and, at a later date, having the opportunity to review the interview transcripts and encoding for accuracy. The reviewing of interview transcripts would be in person or via the mail depending upon your preference. I anticipate that the interview will be approximately one hour in length.

Thank you for your consideration of this project. Please call me if you have any questions.

Pam Schiffbauer
496-0862
Appendix B

Participant Release Agreement

I agree to participate in a dissertation research study of "Reasons for Adults' Decisions to Enter Educational Fields" as described in the attached letter. I understand the purpose and nature of this study and am participating voluntarily. I grant permission for the data to be used in the process of completing the dissertation and any other future publications. I understand that my name and other demographic information that might identify me will not be used. I further understand that my participation in this study will not harm my social or professional status in the Omaha Metro community.

Interview Release

I am available for an interview at the following location(s)__________________________

______________________________
on any of these day(s) and time(s)__________________________________________

I agree also to be available at a mutually agreed time and place for additional interviews if necessary or to verify interview transcripts and encoding if I wish to. I also grant permission for the tape recording of the interview. I understand that the researcher will contact me to verify the location and day and time of the interview.

Date:

______________________________ ________________________________
Signature of the Participant Primary Researcher

Address and Phone Number of Participant

Please return the Participant Release Agreement in the enclosed envelope. Thank you.
Appendix C

Interview Questions

1. What is your current age range? less than 30  30-39  40-49  50-59  60-69
2. How many years had you been in your last employment? 1-5  6-10  11-15  16-20
3. What were your title and responsibilities?
4. What was your annual salary? 0-30,000  31,000-50,000  51,000-70,000  70,000+
5. In your last job, what satisfactions, if any, did you experience?
6. In your last job, what frustrations, if any, did you experience?
7. In your last job, what, if anything, were you proud of?
8. In your last job, did you feel that anything was “missing”? If so, what?
9. Overall, did you feel successful in your last job?
10. Did you resign or take sabbatical leave to pursue your career change?
11. What is the highest degree that you have earned?
12. Did you have any college coursework in the education department?
13. Why didn’t you pursue an educational career prior to this?
14. Describe your reasons for pursuing a degree in education now.
15. What goals do you have related to that decision?
16. Describe the level of support you received from family, friends and co-workers.
17. Describe the level of support you received from university personnel.
18. Are there any other reasons which encouraged you to pursue an educational degree at this time?
19. What are the difficulties, if any, in pursuing a degree in education at this point?
20. What will be some benefits from pursuing an educational career at this point in
your life?

21. What life changes, if any, will be necessary as a result of your decision?

22. Do you have any family members who are currently teachers or who have in the past been teachers?
February 25, 2001

Dear Student,

Thank you for your willingness to participate in my dissertation study, "Factors in Adults' Decisions to Enter Educational Fields." The interviews have been completed and I would appreciate your input on some of the questions that surfaced from those interviews. Would you please answer the questions on this page and send back the form in the enclosed self-addressed envelop? All responses will be confidential.

Thank you very much,
Pam Schiffbauer

1. What is your age? __________ Have you completed a degree? If so, what is the degree? BS____ MS____ In what field? ______________________

2. What is your current occupation and salary? ______________________

3. What degree do you plan to receive in your program at UNO? BS____ MS____
   Major____________________________________________________

4. In regard to reasons why you didn’t enter the field of education after you graduated from high school and/or college, please check any of the following reasons which apply to you:
   ___ didn’t think of it ___ was concerned about my ability to teach
   ___ was concerned about discipline ___ didn’t want to take required coursework
   ___ wasn’t interested in teaching ___ people influenced me not to
   ___ teachers’s salaries were too low ___ wanted to get a job to earn money
   ___ other(s) ________________________________________________

5. There are many reasons for entering the field of education. Please check any of the following reasons which apply to you:
   ___ love of kids ___ income increase
   ___ desire to help society/kids ___ summer/holidays off
   ___ autonomy ___ increased interaction with people
   ___ appreciation by people you help ___ opportunity to travel
   ___ opportunity to learn and grow ___ higher self esteem
   ___ more job options ___ challenge of teaching
   ___ opportunity to be a role model ___ influence of someone who teaches
   ___ other(s) ________________________________________________

6. Do you have any family members who are currently teachers or who have been teachers in the past? If so, please state their relation to you (spouse, father, mother, sister, brother, aunt, uncle, grandfather, grandmother) and their teaching assignment(s)_________________________________________________

Thank you for your assistance.
Pam Schiffbauer
Appendix E
Letter of Attestation for Qualitative Research Done by Pam Schiffbauer

Pam Schiffbauer requested that I conduct an educational audit of her qualitative dissertation entitled: Factors in adults' decisions to enter educational fields. The audit began in April, 2001, with initial review of materials, and was concluded in May, 2001. The purpose of the audit was to ascertain the extent to which the results of the study are trustworthy.

I was initially provided with an early draft of the dissertation, participants' release forms, 15 audio tapes, transcriptions of all the tapes, field notes, one set of member checking postcards, and nine questionnaires from other respondents who were not part of the interview group. I further requested, and was provided with, graphs of member checking responses, written explanations of the color codes used, diagrams of literature review trails, and diagrams of theme developments (color coded), and a current status copy of the dissertation.

The task of the auditor was to determine whether it was possible to follow the researcher's trail from conception, through implementation, to conclusions; and whether those conclusions were warranted by that process.

Initial credibility was established by the adequacy of the study design. It was sufficient for the task.

Reliability was established by determining that confirmable strategies were used such that the coding was grounded in the data, the patterns were grounded in the coding, and that the themes were grounded in the patterns. This confirms that the conclusions bear close relationship to the data; and establish design and procedural evidence of credibility.

I conclude that the focus of the study and the research methods described in the dissertation are in evidence through the analysis of the data provided. Trustworthiness of the study can be established; findings are grounded in the data.

Auditor: Mary K. Smith, Ed.D. Mary K. Smith 5-6-01