

March 2008

At Issue: New Career-Technical Teachers - What Gets Them, and Why is it Important to Know?

Charles Backes
Valdosta State University

Janet Z. Burns
Georgia State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.library.illinoisstate.edu/jste>

Recommended Citation

Backes, Charles and Burns, Janet Z. (2008) "At Issue: New Career-Technical Teachers - What Gets Them, and Why is it Important to Know?," *Journal of STEM Teacher Education*: Vol. 45 : Iss. 1 , Article 8.
Available at: <https://ir.library.illinoisstate.edu/jste/vol45/iss1/8>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by ISU ReD: Research and eData. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of STEM Teacher Education by an authorized editor of ISU ReD: Research and eData. For more information, please contact ISURed@ilstu.edu.

**New Career-Technical Teachers—What Gets Them, and
Why is it Important to Know?**

***Career Motivations of Trade and Industrial and
Healthcare Science Second-Career Teachers***

Charles Backes
Valdosta State University

Janet Z. Burns
Georgia State University

Introduction

The road to finding a career path as a Trade and Industrial (T&I) or Healthcare Science (HSTE) (formerly Heath Occupations) teacher is winding at best. Job incumbents in this profession are hired after years of employment in an occupational field, and subsequently obtain the necessary credentials for their new teaching career (Burns, Schaefer, & Hayden, 2005). Various models of career motivation offer reasons why individuals choose a certain career and reasons why individuals may or may not be successful in a career choice (Lopes, 2006). Additionally, a variety of theories have been offered to explain career choices of people in general, for those in helping careers and for those in career and technical education (Harms & Knoblock, 2005). While these models and theories have great value to any discussion on career development, they fall short when it comes to determining why individuals whose first career choice was to work in a trade or in healthcare make a career change into teaching, and what influences them to make that change. In fact, the career development of T&I and HSTE teachers is largely unknown and overlooked.

Charles Backes is a Professor at Valdosta State University. He can be reached at cbackes@valdosta.edu.

Janet Zaleski Burns is an Associate Professor at Georgia State University. She can be reached at jburns@gsu.edu.

This exploratory study surfaced from the researchers' experience as T&I and HSTE teacher educators, and a review of previous research and literature revealing a scarcity of available data about the reasons T&I and HSTE professionals choose to change careers and become teachers. Our primary purpose is to describe the career choice motivations of T&I and HSTE teachers. From a practical standpoint, we would like to provide insight for those in the school system who recruit teachers and those who have the goal to retain them. It is our belief that we must understand the career motivations of new T&I and HSTE teachers in order to provide better induction into the field, mentoring that matches needs and stronger retention.

“Recruitment” of T&I and HSTE Teachers

Over the past 15 years, while working with new T&I and HSTE teachers we've heard numerous stories about how they have been “recruited” to fill vacant teaching positions. School nurses have been moved into healthcare science classes. Certified technicians at the “bus barn” have been transferred into automotive technology instructor positions. Maintenance personnel have been persuaded to teach construction classes. And, at least one HVAC technician has even been lured from his duties on the roof of the school while making repairs to the air conditioning system in order to become the new industrial maintenance instructor.

From years of conversations with these teachers, we know anecdotally that they bring varying values and motivations to their initial teaching experience. We also know that they enter their classrooms and laboratories with high expectations for themselves and for their students. Yet, like teachers of other content areas, over the course of one year they begin questioning their abilities to be teachers, and also have declining confidence in the learning potential of their students (Harris and Associates, Inc., 1991). During the first three years of the teaching profession is when teachers are most likely to leave (Ingersol, 2001).

The context in which new T&I and HSTE incumbents begin their work as a teacher and their motivations shapes their view of the teaching profession. It seems reasonable to suggest individuals, such

as T&I and HSTE teachers, with a set of job preference values similar to circumstances surrounding their actual work as a teacher will experience greater job satisfaction than those individuals for whom the relationship between personal values and realities is zero, or even worse, negative. Blumenfeld (1988) suggested that as the values of the individual differ from the values of an institution, the individual will leave the institution. Therefore, from the point(s) of view of the new teacher, it seems worthwhile to be aware of, have, and/or develop a list of job attribute preferences so as to enhance subsequent career satisfaction. Additionally, the knowledge of individual teacher values in juxtaposition with job realities might facilitate traditional school organization activities such as recruiting, selection, assimilation and professional development.

A Special Collaboration

The extraordinary need for training new T&I and HSTE teachers brought program coordinators from two universities together to explore options for filling this need. It readily became apparent that there was a larger issue than having “enough seats” in a class to fill certification needs. The discussion led us to questioning ourselves as to how we can support the new teachers so that they are successful in their work and retained in higher numbers.

We decided to explore and describe why the students in our programs were choosing teaching as a second-career. Additionally we wanted to discover what similarities and differences existed in their reasons. We also desired moving toward the possibility of developing an instrument for more sophisticated research.

A review of the literature revealed no instrument targeted to T&I and HSTE teachers in the area of motivation to enter teaching. To begin, the two T& I and HSTE educators conducted interviews with 20 T&I and HSTE teachers to obtain lists of reasons why they chose to become teachers. The interviews yielded 12 key areas, which we combined into 9 reasons. Some of the reasons were extrinsic, or relating to motivation reasons related to environment, and some were intrinsic or internal values.

We developed a simple questionnaire that asked respondents to, “check only one of the reasons listed below as the primary reason that made them decide to enter the teaching profession: advancement/prestige, health reasons, hours, love of subject matter, pay (including benefits), religious calling, secular (non religious) calling, security, working conditions, other (specify reason).” The questionnaire was field tested with 16 former graduates of one of the programs. Additional changes in wording were made to reflect the feedback provided by the field testers.

The Profile of the New Teachers

During the summers of 2004, 2005 and 2006, participants who attended the New Teacher Institutes for T&I and HSTE teachers at Georgia State University and Valdosta State University in Georgia were asked to anonymously complete the questionnaire on the first day of class.

Of the 125 (100%) new teachers who participated in the survey, 57% were in their previous primary vocation for 8 to 15 years, and 52% reported having been their previous vocation more than 21 years. Ages ranged from 21 to 58. The teachers came from a diverse assortment of careers including nursing, emergency response, automotive technology, graphic design, construction, cosmetology, culinary arts, television and video production, law enforcement, human resource management, photography, and drafting.

From the Point of View of the Teachers

While the questionnaire asked the respondents to choose one reason, and the researchers expected that the stated reasons would suffice based on the field test, the results indicated otherwise. All respondents had one or more reasons why they were transitioning from full-time, certified industry or health professionals to certified educational professionals. Many of the respondents to the questionnaire were able to provide a primary reason why they entered the teaching profession, but when they saw the “other” category, they listed reasons in addition to the primary reason. In

fact, many listed multiple additional reasons. The reasons stated were sometimes related to each other, but often they were not related. Following is an overview of reasons cited for becoming teachers. We will review the list in order of selection preference.

Religious or Secular Calling

The most frequent reason given for entering the teaching profession is the belief that the new teacher was “called” into the teaching profession. Nineteen percent of the respondents reported that they felt a “religious calling” to the profession, while 12 percent reported a “non-religious or secular calling.” Combined, this indicates that nearly a third, or 31 percent, of the respondents felt “led” into the profession. When interviewed, they reported the desire to impact students and schools on a meaningful and perhaps a spiritual level.

Hours

Thirty percent of respondents indicated a desire to spend more time with their families, especially their children. They mentioned better schedules and working hours, no more “shift work”, less travel time between home and the workplace, and summers and holidays away from the workplace. Several wrote that they had spouses who are teachers, and that they were looking forward to having the same schedule as their spouse.

Pay and Benefits

The third reason most reported for career selection was pay and benefits. Twenty-eight percent of the respondents selected “pay and benefits” as the primary reason for entering the teaching profession. Several respondents crossed out “pay” and indicated that “benefits” were what motivated them to enter the teaching profession. This makes sense when one considers that often construction personnel, automotive technicians, and others in industry receive lucrative salaries, but do not receive retirement, insurance, and sick leave benefits at a level competitive with education.

Love of Subject Matter

A considerable number of respondents, 10 percent, indicated that the love of their profession whether nursing or culinary arts, made them want to share it with others. Several mentioned “giving trained professionals back to their community” or “positively affecting others to choose a good career.” These respondents seem to have a desire to advance their previous occupation or profession.

Other

Nearly half of the respondents wrote a reason in the “Other,” section of the questionnaire along with the reason they noted in the selection boxes. This required that they write in their reason for entering the profession. The “write-in” reason that was most frequently mentioned was a “personal love of teaching.” Many of the respondents indicated that they had previous teaching experiences in industry, civic organizations, church organizations or other levels of academia. These respondents chose to combine their technical expertise with an opportunity to teach full time in a high school setting. Some of the other reasons that were written in are: enjoy working with young people, retirement from previous vocation, encouraged by others to apply for an open position, tired of performing manual labor, other family members are teachers, a new challenge, desiring support from a chain of command, the ability not to be “micro-managed”, and always wanted to be a teacher.

What does this mean?

Why should administrators and educational organizations be concerned with the motivations of T&I and HSTE teachers entering the field? We believe this question is crucial when it comes to recruitment and even more critical when considering retention issues. The National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future Report (Hunt, & Carroll, 2003), purports, “The conventional wisdom is that we lack enough good teachers. But, the conventional wisdom is wrong. The real school staffing problem is teacher retention” (p. 6).

We contend that the current condition of the teacher labor market, number of applicants in comparison with number of

positions, lends itself to the school organization accommodating the teacher more than the teacher accommodating the school organization. If the organization does not have a clear understanding of what motivates an individual to become a T&I or HSTE teacher, or what expectations the new teachers bring to their new workplace, is difficult to keep a teacher who feels rewarded and satisfied. We suggest that this does not necessarily have to be an expensive proposition for the organization. We further suggest that school systems must consider ways to keep these new teachers in their positions, and not allow them to lose sight of why they entered in the first place. Let's take a look at some possible suggestions, based on our experience, which may provide answers to premature burnout and turnover of these new educators. Again, we have organized our suggestions according to most selected responses.

Calling, Religious and Secular

Since we found that 31 percent of new T&I and HSTE teachers come into the profession to make a difference in students' lives, we believe that opportunities must be provided that allow them to do so. The issue of whether they have a "divine calling" or a "secular calling" may not really matter. The fact is that they feel "called" to teaching should be recognized. We suggest that these teachers may feel rewarded by the opportunity to get involved in their students' lives beyond the classroom. Co-curricular, career-technical student organization (CTSO) advisor responsibilities may provide these opportunities. Advisors work in small groups with students, focusing on specific individual needs. They often get to meet and interact with the parents and families of the CTSO members. A special bond can be created between the advisor and the group of CTSO officers. Other opportunities to serve as advisors and mentors also exist through extracurricular activities such as academic clubs and organizations, and civic organizations. New teachers who enter the profession to "make a difference" must feel empowered and supported in their efforts to do so. They often welcome opportunities to serve on advisory boards, student support teams, and parent-student boards. If these teachers don't feel that they are truly making

a difference, they will likely experience job dissatisfaction because of unmet expectations.

Hours

Changing careers and taking on a new role with new responsibilities requires a great deal of effort and time. Some new teachers enter the profession with an inaccurate perception of the amount of time that must be devoted to becoming an effective educator. Therefore, the organization should be sensitive to this issue and help new teachers become organized and efficient. Occupations and professions, other than teaching, incorporate levels of responsibilities. Unfortunately, beginning teachers are traditionally expected to assume all the same responsibilities as more experienced teachers, and are often assigned the most difficult and challenging students, those that their more experienced colleagues do not want to teach.

Arguably, teachers have more time away from their workplaces than many occupations and professions. Shifts at hospitals, automobile service centers, construction sites, restaurants, and other technical workplaces can be 12 hour days, and sometimes six or seven days a week. Shift work also brings irregular work hours and often having to work on holidays. Most regular school-based activities don't occur on weekends, and few schools require teachers to work on major holidays. Additionally, winter, fall, and spring breaks often add up to weeks of holiday time, far out-pacing most vacations or breaks given in industry.

However, since schedule can be a major attractant to many new, second-career teachers, we believe that it is critical that administrators not overload new teachers with extra responsibilities that take them away from their families and personal lives to the extent that they were better off in their previous careers. These extra responsibilities may include extended day or extended year assignments, club or extracurricular assignments or extensive participation in professional development activities that are conducted after school or on weekends. When extra duties are necessary, it may be a bonus to these individuals if involvement of

family members is possible, as is often the case with conferences and many student organization events.

Pay and Benefits

While some second-career teachers enter the profession from previous jobs that had higher pay, others experience an increase in their pay. However, nearly one fourth of our respondents chose this as their main motivator, making this a key issue. Institutions have limited resources and need to be creative in this area. For job incumbents who enter teaching to make more money, extended-day grants and extended-year contracts may be critical to recruitment and retention. The opportunity to earn supplemental income gives the new teacher the chance to provide financially for his or her desired level of economic status, while providing the school district with a highly-skilled, trained employee. These teachers may receive the supplemental pay for teaching an extra class during the school day or for teaching in a night-school or community education program. Extended-year opportunities may provide the district with extra maintenance personnel, health professionals, coaches, or tutors, depending on the teacher's skills and knowledge. Some states use extended-day grants to reward the advisors of CTSO's.

New teachers may have difficulty meeting initial certification requirements if they do not have the money to pay for college classes or other alternative certification programs, and this can be a reason they leave teaching. Unfortunately, we have encountered more often than not that new teachers have not been informed by the hiring organization that they would need to become certified, and how much of their salary will go towards certification. Some teach until their provisional certification expires and then return to their previous career. We suggest more transparency in the hiring process so that the job incumbent can make an informed decision, as well as understand the need to plan for education expenses. While further education is a reasonable expectation when one chooses to make a career change, it should not come as a surprise to the new teacher after they have accepted a position. Some organizations offer to cover some or all of the expenses as an investment in their new employee.

Although teacher salaries have increased over the past decade, many reports point out that when adjusted for inflation teacher salaries still lag behind other similar professions. Furthermore, compensation for teachers over the last ten years increased at a far slower rate than salaries for other professionals (Education International, 2005). On another note, research by Johnson (1986) revealed that better pay and higher status may draw incumbents to the teaching profession, but those reasons most likely aren't sufficient to retain outstanding teachers. Her research found that the best teachers stay in teaching because of intrinsic awards. However, sometimes they may be forced to leave because of poor salary or working conditions (Johnson, 1986). With that all said, we believe it is important for school systems to know how to attract and keep T&I and HSTE teachers other than through compensation. Further, education institutions need more options for recognizing and enhancing the environment and maintaining the satisfaction of their teachers than to simply throw money at them.

Love of Subject Matter

Our respondents pointed out that many new T&I and HSTE teachers have a love and respect for their professions. They take pride in being healthcare workers, skilled technicians, or experienced members of a craft. Teaching allows them to make a career change without giving up the identity of being part of their original occupation or profession. These teachers are motivated to prepare others for that profession to provide for the future of the field. These teachers need to feel respected by others for their professions. We suggest that T&I and HSTE teachers be given more opportunity to collaborate with academic teachers in order to share their areas of expertise. Further, when T&I and HSTE teachers are segregated or placed in building locations that are undesirable, it is difficult to make a good impression on other employees of the school, or feel respected.

We also think it is extremely important that these teachers are provided with students who have the desire and aptitude to be successful in their programs. It is discouraging for a teacher to be given students who can't read or compute a simple fraction when the

teacher is required to teach them how to take and chart vital signs or read a blueprint.

We suggest that it is important to allow these new teachers to keep their identities with their technical or health related profession through attendance at technically-related conferences and seminars. Some of these teachers will seek opportunities to occasionally return to the field through temporary assignments or “educators in industry” programs.

The opportunity to supervise work-based learning students may be attractive to these teachers as this would help keep them in touch with their first occupation or profession. These professionals will generally strive to keep their licensures and certifications up to date and they should be respected and recognized for doing so, even though it may not be a requirement to remain in the classroom.

Personal Love of Teaching

Many new, second-career teachers are motivated because they perceive that they love teaching. It doesn’t matter where or how they discovered this motivation; they know that it is real and teaching fulfills a personal need. It is not surprising to know that these teachers seek ways to make teaching and learning more enjoyable and effective. They strive for a sense of autonomy and challenge in their classrooms.

When interviewed, these teachers had the expectation of having the facility, tools, equipment and resources needed to do their job well. They desire a functional environment with a reasonable number of students. These teachers often have no desire for a reduced load. Ironically, they are sometimes looked down upon by their peers and administrators for not getting more involved with other school functions. It is important to keep in mind that these new teachers are not reluctant to get involved; they simply want to focus on the actual teaching-learning process.

Next Steps

The quest to find the reasons T&I and HSTE professionals choose to change careers and become teachers started as a

conversation between two teacher educators. We wanted to describe the career choice motivations of T&I and HSTE teachers. Admittedly, we started quite simply. Since then, we have located an extensive study over a 30-year period in which approximately 57,000 job applicants ranked the importance of ten job attributes that they perceived makes a job good or bad, i.e., individual values. The instrument itself (Job Preference Blank) has an extensive background in a variety of non-academic and academic settings (Jurgensen, 1978). We would like to adapt this instrument for use with T&I and HSTE teachers. We believe the hierarchical, rank order nature of the instrument will give us better descriptive within group data. We would also collect data on other teacher groups for comparison.

Conclusion

New second-career teachers who enter the healthcare science and trade and industrial education classrooms have numerous reasons for being there. Most can't attribute their desires to enter the classroom to one reason, but they want to be successful teachers. Administrators also want them to be there and want them to be successful so that they will remain in the classroom. By considering the reasons why these professionals become teachers, school systems can provide the resources and assignments that may lead toward a more satisfied, productive T&I or HSTE educator who is more likely to stay in the classroom. By having satisfied, productive teachers in the classroom, students are the greatest beneficiaries. Isn't this what education is really all about?

References

Blumenfeld, W. S. (1988). Job attribute preference of one group of intellectually gifted individuals: A description and comparison with selected groups of incumbent managers, potential entrepreneurs, and management MBA. (In-service grant). Atlanta, GA: Georgia State University, College of Business Administration.

- Burns, J. Z., Schaefer, K., & Hayden, J. M. (2005). New Trade and Industrial teachers' perceptions of formal learning versus informal learning and teaching proficiency. *Journal of Industrial Teacher Education*, 42(3), 66-87.
- Education International (2005). Status of teachers—Teacher salaries lag behind inflation. Retrieved November 25, 2007. Website: <http://www.ei-ie.org/statusofteachers/en/newsshow.php?id=16&theme=statusofteachers&country=usa>
- Harris and Associates, Inc. (1991). *The Metropolitan Life survey of the American teacher, 1991. The first year: New teachers' expectations and ideals*. New York: Author.
- Harms, B. M. & Knobloch, N. S. (2005). Preservice teachers' motivation and leadership behaviors related to career choice. *Career and Technical Education Research*, 30(2), 101-124.
- Hunt, J. & Carroll, T. (2003). No dream denied: A pledge to America's Children. National Commission on Teaching and America's Future Report.
- Ingersol, R. M. (2001). Teacher turnover and teacher shortages: An organizational analysis. *American Education Research Journal*, 38(3), 499-534.
- Jurgensen, C. E. (1978). Job preferences (What makes a job good or bad?). *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 63, 267-276.
- Johnson, S. M. (1986). Incentives for teachers: What motivates, what matters? *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 22(3), 54-79.
- Lopes, T. P., (2006). Career development of foreign-born workers: Where is the career motivation research? *Human Resource Development Review*, 5(4), 478-493.