SECOND CAREER TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR PROFESSION

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The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of career choice of second career teachers currently in at least their fifth year of work in the classroom and the factors that influence these perceptions. Seven second career teachers, all in their fifth year or more of teaching, were the participants in the study. Each participant had an original degree in an area other than education and worked in a first career other than teaching for five or more years.

The second career teachers in this study participated in three interviews, each 60–90 minutes in length, over a 10-month period of time. For a minimum time period of 6 weeks, each participant also kept a critical incident log in which he or she recorded experiences that caused him or her to reflect either positively or negatively on his or her decision to become a teacher. These experiences were then further discussed during the interviews. Transcripts from the interviews were reviewed and coded for themes across participants.

Results showed that all of the second career teachers in the study perceived themselves as successful and satisfied in their new profession despite the challenges they identified, such as unsupportive administrators and challenging students. Due to their perceived success and satisfaction as teachers, all of the participants believed that they made the right decision to choose teaching as a second career. Commonalities were
identified across the participants in this study with respect to the factors that keep them teaching, such as their perceived positive impact on the lives of their students, as well as those factors that could cause them to exit the teaching profession, such as an opportunity to specialize in a specific area of education. Both differences and similarities were identified in the perceptions of elementary school versus secondary school participants with the most notable difference that the secondary level teachers perceived their greatest challenge as their relationship with their administrators, and elementary level teachers saw their greatest challenge as the requirements associated with teaching special education students.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Many teachers see their chosen profession as a calling or a vocation rather than just a day-to-day job, and they define themselves both professionally and personally as a teacher, not simply as someone who works in a school. They give more than just skill and time to their students; many also commit a piece of their hearts and souls. For a lot of these teachers, the desire to pursue a profession in education began when they were very young, while as children they pretended to be teachers with their friends and siblings. As young adults, some fulfilled this dream and enrolled in an education program preparing to have a real classroom of their own. Others found a new interest in the business world or a health profession. Then there are those that, for a variety of reasons, did not choose teaching for a first career but rather committed to another occupation, yet sometime later in life realized that teaching is the career where they belong. This research study focuses upon this last group of teachers, those entering the teaching profession after having worked elsewhere for a number of years and then later choosing teaching as their second career.

Statement of the Problem

The number of second career teachers in this country has grown substantially since the early 1990s when researchers warned the nation of an impending teacher shortage. Since that time, many colleges and universities, as well as independent organizations, have created ways for professionals from other careers to obtain teacher
certification and/or licensure within a relatively short amount of time. They aim to profit from these new teacher candidates in a business sense and at the same time keep qualified teachers in the nation’s classrooms. A recent national survey conducted by Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc. (2008), *Teaching as a Second Career*, predicted that another teacher shortage is on the horizon in this country. The problem is threefold. First, the majority of the current American teaching force is aging and quickly closing in on retirement. “Almost 2/3 of all teachers were age 40 or over in 1993–1994” (Serotkin, 2006, p. 1). Second, approximately half of the new graduates of education programs leave the profession before teaching five years, often discouraged by the low salary and societal status of teachers along with the increased difficulty and responsibility of a teacher’s job (Ingersoll, 2001). Third, the American K-12 student population is increasing along with the public pressure to reduce class size as schools strive to prepare students for state and national assessments (Serotkin, 2006).

The survey analysis conducted by Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc. (2008) calculates a vacancy of 1.5 million teaching jobs over the next decade. In addition, it was found that 42% of the survey’s participants, all of whom were college-educated Americans aged 24 to 60, would consider becoming a teacher. In total, there were 2,292 participants in the survey, with 2,000 interviews taking place over the phone and the remaining 292 over the Internet so as to contact what Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc., termed the “harder-to-reach groups, including 24 to 29 year olds, Hispanics, and African Americans” (p. 11). All participants had a minimum of a bachelor’s degree and 82% were employed. Over 40% of the participants stated that they had considered
teaching at some point in the past even though they had never pursued the career. Many of the participants who stated they would not consider teaching as a career in the future also stated that they were not willing to pursue any different career at the current stage in their lives. Commenting on the results of the survey, Sibyl Jacobson, president of the MetLife Foundation, the organization that funded the survey, stated that identifying possible teacher candidates can help relieve a large part of the impending teacher shortage.

Professionals from other fields are an untapped resource and could help schools solve crucial staffing problems in key shortage areas, such as math and science and hard-to-staff schools. The survey identifies who we need to recruit and how, and provides important clues into developing policies that will encourage more people to enter the teaching profession. (Woodrow Wilson Foundation, 2008, p. 2)

With the state of the present economy and the downsizing of industry, many college-educated professionals are now finding themselves out of work and with the unexpected opportunity to choose a second occupational path. Amid the low availability of jobs, many of these professionals are returning to universities in search of a different career altogether, and a large percentage is enrolling in teacher preparation programs. According to Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc. (2008), the teaching profession is attractive to mid-career changers for three reasons: (a) the perception that teaching meshes with their goals to find personally rewarding careers, (b) the chance to contribute to society, and (c) the opportunity to balance work and family responsibilities. There is a negative side, though, according to survey data, and it is money. Low teacher pay was
identified as a concern for many second career potential pre-service teacher candidates.
But short-term preparation programs, along with the high prospect of a secure position in
the job market, often offset the low salary. Both the enrollment and the number of
alternative licensure programs themselves are currently on the rise.

Graduate schools of education have witnessed dramatically increased enrollments
in their post-baccalaureate alternative certification programs; and NCES [National
Center for Education Statistics] has reported a growing number of “delayed
entrant” teachers coming from other occupations. In fact, according to NCES
statistics and other reports, almost half of all public school teacher applicants in
1994 were not first-career teachers, and nearly one third of all new teachers in
1998 earned their certification through graduate programs and reported working
in other careers during the previous year. (Serotkin, 2006)

Second career teachers have also spurred much interest in educational literature
over the last 20 years, as researchers try to define who these new teachers are and why
they are choosing teaching as their second profession. Throughout the 1990s, when
research on second career teachers was at its peak, many researchers studied second
career teachers’ motivations for the career change (Crow, Levine, & Nager, 1990;
Freidus & Krasnow, 1991; Lerner & Zittleman, 2002; Serow, 1993), the specific
programs created to prepare them for an occupation in education (Darling-Hammond,
1990; Feiman-Nemser & Parker, 1990; Ruckel, 2000), as well as their performance
during their induction years, as they entered public schools and classrooms to work on
their own (Freidus, 1992; Novak & Knowles, 1992; Spencer & Tinajero, 1989). Since
then, other research has focused on the influence of the teachers’ first careers on their classroom practices (Eifler & Potthoff, 1998; Mayotte, 2001) or a comparison between the experiences of first career and second career teachers either in their training programs or in their first few years as teachers (Novak & Knowles, 1992; Pellettieri, 2003; Powell, 1997; Wayman, Foster, Mantle-Bromley, & Wilson, 2003).

Little research, however, has been conducted on second career teachers’ satisfaction with their choice of career, and few researchers have gone back to investigate what percentage of second career educators are still in classrooms, or if some have gone on to a third or maybe even a fourth profession. The literature on teacher retention and attrition states that 50% of new teachers leave within the first five years of service (Ingersoll, 2001), but it does not separate first career from second career teachers in the statistics. Several researchers have found what they term “a greater sense of commitment to teaching” among second career teachers, but their studies take place during the teachers’ preparation phase of their career (Crow et al., 1990; Freidus, 1992; Lerner & Zittleman, 2002). Other researchers have noted many benefits and positive contributions that second career teachers bring to schools and to education as a whole, but their research is conducted during only the induction phase of their teaching (Freidus, 1992; Gonzales Rodriguez & Sjostrom, 1998; Novak & Knowles, 1992). After their first few years in the classroom, second career teachers are molded in with the rest of the teaching force and seldom studied as a separate subgroup of the teaching population. However, as the number of second career teachers continues to rise, even more research on them as a
distinct subgroup of teachers is needed to determine how teacher educators and school
districts can prepare and support them in their new career.

This research study begins to fill part of the large gap in the research on second
career teachers, by separating second career teachers out as a subgroup years after they
have left their teacher preparation programs. It investigates seven second career teachers’
perceptions on their decision to become teachers; all seven teachers have been teaching
five or more years. In attempting to understand the perceptions of these second career
teachers with regard to their decision to be teachers, I chose to conduct a qualitative study
that utilized in-depth interviews to gather data, since qualitative research can provide the
rich detail needed for developing an understanding of the participants’ point of view.
The study took place over a 10-month period and investigated the teachers’ perceptions
of their choice of career and why they planned to either remain in or leave the teaching
profession.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of career choice of
second career teachers currently in at least their fifth year of work in the classroom and
the factors that influence these perceptions.

Research Questions

What perceptions do second career teachers have of their choice of profession?
1. What factors influence these perceptions?
2. Do they perceive that they made the “right” decision?
3. What factors influence their decision to remain in or leave the teaching profession?

4. What are the similarities and differences between the perceptions of secondary level and primary level teachers?

**Significance of the Study**

This study will contribute to the literature on second career teachers and to the field of teacher education by revealing more about this subgroup of the teaching force. With a complete understanding of second career teachers, universities and individual teacher preparation programs can more fully prepare these teachers for a career in the classroom. In addition, school administrators and mentors can better assist them in their transition and continued success in their schools. At present, the research on second career teachers focuses primarily on why they choose teaching and how they transition to working in a classroom. In order to have second career teachers remain in the profession as successful and satisfied teachers, they need to be mentored and supported throughout their careers, not just at the onset. This study investigates second career teachers who have been in the classroom a minimum of five years and therefore begins to inform researchers, teacher educators, administrators, and mentors about this subgroup of teachers beyond what is known through current research.

If teacher education is to be able to prepare this sub-group of teachers for today’s classrooms and the students of the future, and if schools and administrators are to be able to support these second career teachers and help them to be successful in their new profession, they must first recognize the importance of this growing faction of the teacher
population and the fact that they are different from the traditional first year teacher. They must also recognize that second career teachers can contribute a great deal to the field of teacher education long after they have passed through their preparation programs and survived their first few years of teaching. As mentioned, most of the research already conducted on second career teachers focuses on the limited time period of their teacher preparation years and either their first or second year of teaching. This research study is unique to current research on second career teachers because it investigates the perceptions of second career teachers five or more years after they have been in their own classrooms.

**Researcher’s Perspective**

I have been a teacher for 16 years, 9 in southern Ohio and 7 in my current district in northeast Ohio. Throughout that time, I have served the field of education in many capacities—as a high school teacher, a university instructor, a mentor teacher, and, at all times, a student.

I became interested in the topic of second career teachers through a class assignment during my first year of doctoral study. I began the project with the intent to investigate the relationship between student teachers and cooperating teachers since that year there were four student teachers in my department at the high school where I worked. As I talked to each of the student teachers, however, I discovered that three of them were becoming teachers after successful careers in other professions. I was intrigued and began to ask others in my school if they knew any other second career teachers. I was astonished at how many there were, just in the high school where I was
working. Having always wanted to be a teacher and seeing the profession as a calling, I was fascinated that so many people decided to become teachers later in life and after already trying their hand at another profession. I immediately assumed three things about second career teachers: (a) they must have become teachers for the perceived self benefits such as summers off and good health insurance; (b) they must think that teaching is easy; and (c) they must not be very good at their new job. I was even more perplexed when I learned that so many of them came from what seemed to me as very good careers, ones with high salaries and professional status.

In an effort to satisfy my curiosity, I changed my research topic that year to investigate the motivations behind second career teacher job change. I found four second career teachers outside of my department and conducted interviews and observations of their teaching. One had been a bank executive, one a journalist, one a high ranking executive at a very successful company, and one a Marine Corps officer. Through my study and the review of the research on second career teachers, I quickly found that all three of my assumptions were false. Like other researchers had found in their studies, I discovered that my participants became teachers for many reasons, most of them altruistic and not self-serving. They thought teaching was the hardest job they have ever had, yet the most rewarding. And they were each extremely creative and effective in their teaching methods and interactions with their students in their classrooms.

Since the literature on second career teachers has primarily focused upon examining the motivational factors of becoming a teacher as well as their preparation programs and induction to teaching, I decided to alter my research topic for my final
project as a doctoral student. I read and reread the past and current literature on second career teachers until I found a gap that I believed was worth investigating. I found that little research has been conducted on second career teachers after their first few years in the profession. My goal with this research study is to start to fill that gap.

The next chapter, Chapter 2, is a review of the literature relevant to this study. It begins with the theoretical orientation of the study and then continues with a discussion of career theories and the literature on career transition and theories related to mid-career change. Finally, it concludes with a focus on the literature regarding second career teachers including a more thorough discussion of the relevance of this study in relation to the gap in that literature.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology used in this study. It begins with the rationale for the choice of research paradigm and includes a thorough description of the methods used to choose participants, collect data, and analyze the data. In addition, trustworthiness and the quality of this study are discussed in detail.

Chapter 4 provides an in-depth discussion of the outcomes of this study as a result of systematic data collection and analysis. It includes biographies of each participant, a discussion of common themes identified from the data provided by the participants, and how these themes answer the study’s original research question and sub-questions.

Finally, Chapter 5 discusses the relationship between the themes that emerged as a result of this study and the related literature on career theory, mid-career change research, and the literature on second career teachers. It subsequently presents future implications and suggestions for further educational research.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter presents a review of the literature relevant to this study. It begins with the theoretical orientation of the study and the definition of a career in its most general terms. It then discusses career transitions and theories related to mid-career change, as well as their implications on this study. Finally, the chapter focuses on the literature regarding second career teachers and other research studies pertinent to this one.

Theoretical Orientation

The concept of a career is most often defined as a series of jobs or positions which occur in an orderly and hierarchical progression up an occupational ladder with both status and economic reward (Moen, 1998). Much research has been conducted and many theories have been developed regarding the reasons behind career choice and the motivation to stay in or abandon an initiated career path (Ginzberg, Ginzburg, Axelrad, & Herma, 1951; Holland, 1973; Parson, 1909; Sharf, 1997; Super, 1957, 1990). In addition, many researchers have studied the transition process of those people who do choose to move from one career to another in an attempt to explain career change (Bejian & Salomone, 1995; Jones, 1992; Krumboltz, 1979, 1994; Stoltz-Loike, 1995). In recent years, career change has become even more common as a result of the expansion of a more global economy and the advancement of technology in all aspects of the job market which in turn often lead to downsizing, restructuring of job ladders, and even the
destruction of the traditional organizational career (Moen, 1998). Other researchers attribute the increase in career change to additional factors including the lengthening of life spans and the increased attainment of higher education (Kanchier & Unruh, 1989). This study looked specifically at second career teachers, those educators who decide to be teachers after training for and working in a different profession for several years, as well as their perceptions of that career choice now that they have been in education for five or more years. My intent with this study is to add to the research on this growing subgroup of the teaching force in an effort to inform teacher education programs designed to prepare these nontraditional teacher candidates for working with today’s students. Next, I first briefly discuss theories related to career development and then those associated with career transitions. Finally, I discuss the literature that specifically addresses those mid-career changers who decide to become teachers.

**Career Development Theories**

**Trait and Factor Theory**

According to literature, there is a large variety of career development theories which trace back to the 1900s beginning with Frank Parson’s first statement about what a career is and the benefits of choosing a profession rather than just a means to a paycheck. According to Parson (1909), finding oneself in the right career provides a profit on both sides, for the employer as well as for the employee. “Parson believed that if a person chose a vocation, rather than merely hunting for a job, the worker’s satisfaction and success would increase and the employer’s costs and inefficiency would decrease” (Brown & Brooks, 1990, p. 2). From this belief, Parson then developed strategies to help
people identify their traits, or personal resources, as well as their specific abilities and interests. He then developed strategies to subsequently match those traits to a specific industry. Parson proposed that in order to select a profession, one should have

(a) a clear understanding of him or herself—attitudes, interests, ambitions, resource limitations, and their causes; (b) a knowledge of the requirements and conditions of success, advantages and disadvantages, compensation, opportunities, and prospects in different lines of work; and (c) true reasoning on the relations of these two groups of facts. (Parson, 1909 as cited in Maduakolam, 2000, p. 3)

His concept of career development became the basis for what later became called the Trait and Factor Theory (Parson, 1909). The trait part of the theory referred to the characteristics of the individual with regard to skills as well as attitude, and the factors that were needed attributes for success in a particular job. Parson’s theory has had a great influence in the study of career development and continues to be drawn upon even today in the development of other statements about career choice and the definition of professional success.

Ginzberg’s General Theory of Occupational Choice

In the early 1950s, Ginzberg et al. (1951) proposed a theory radically different from that of Parson. They suggested that career choice was not simply a matching game of an individual’s traits to the qualities of a specific job, but rather a developmental process that occurs over a number of years and that completes in early adulthood. They described this process as “irreversible” and “characterized by compromise” since people
have to balance their interests, skills, options, and opportunities (Brown & Brooks, 1990). It became known as Ginzberg’s General Theory of Occupational Choice, and it is characterized by three phases, the fantasy period which occurs throughout childhood as children act out different professions in their imaginations and in their play, the tentative stage during the teen years, when they are approaching the time of their life where they will decide which career to pursue, and the realistic period which begins by about age 18, as most young adults enter the work force in one aspect or another. Some 20 years later, Ginzberg (1972) adapted the theory by stating that the process does not end in adulthood, but rather that it is an open-ended process that continues for a person’s entire life span. This restatement allows, then, for some explanation of those people who work several different jobs, many in hopes of eventually settling in for a long time career that will match their skills and provide them with professional satisfaction.

**Life-Span Theory**

In line with Ginzberg’s idea about a life-time process of career decision making, Donald Super (1957, 1984, 1990) formed his Life-Span theory of career development. Like Ginzberg et al. (1951) and Ginzberg (1972), Super described stages, or time periods, in a person’s life which influence his career choices; his stages were more numerous, however, and covered a more lengthy time period in a person’s life, up to and including the retirement years. His five stage model begins with a phase much like Ginzberg’s fantasy period, one full of growth and experimentation. The second stage, or exploration, similar to Ginzberg’s tentative period, is characterized by investigation and trial of various career options. The establishment stage follows, and it involves the choice of a
career and stabilization within that profession, usually beginning around the age of 25. The fourth stage, or maintenance stage, is represented by continued work in one’s field, and the fifth stage, referred to as decline, is characterized by the worker preparing for and entering into the retirement period of his life. At the core of Super’s theory is the idea of self-concept, or how a person sees himself and his situation. “Super felt that a person strives to implement his or her self-concept by choosing an occupation that permits self-expression—a person selects an occupation whose requirements provide a role consistent with his or her self-image” (Maduakolam, 2000, p. 6). His theory, much like that of Ginzberg’s, is based on two main concepts: that career development is a continuous, ongoing process and that it occurs in a distinct order. In contrast to Ginzberg’s theory, however, Super divides into three stages what would all take place during Ginzberg’s one realistic period. Similarly to Ginzberg and his restatement of his career theory, Super (1984) updated his career model many years after his first assertion, in response to the changing nature of the job market and the new characteristics of the term career. He stated that each transitioning from one stage to the next often involved a return to one or more of the other stages, a process he termed recycling. According to Super (1990), this process most likely occurs many times throughout the years of one’s career and even more so for those who are frequent career changers. Bejian and Salomone (1995) have gone so far as to suggest that a sixth stage be added to Super’s theory, one that will even further address the idea of “career renewal” and rejuvenation with regard to professional goals and aspirations.
Personality Theory of Vocational Choice

John Holland (1973) developed his Personality Theory of Vocational Choice about career decision-making and based it on a parallel classification system of six types of occupational environments and individual personality types. Holland believed that people will choose jobs in environments that will allow them to exercise their skills and explore their interests. One of the most important concepts of his theory is that of congruence, which Sharf (1997) defined as “the relationship of the personality to the environment” (as cited in Maduakolam, 2000, p. 7). Congruence is achieved when the personality type matches the job environment, a process of matching that career counselors attempt to perform as they strive to help their clients find ideal work situations. As with both Ginzberg (1972) and Super (1984, 1990), Holland (1977) added to his theory in later years to include a rationale for those workers who change careers. He stated that when people leave one profession to pursue another it is usually due to a lack of harmonization between the workers’ interests or skills and the environment in which they worked, signifying a failure on the part of the career counselor and his attempt to attain congruence for his clients.

Erikson’s Adult Development Model

While he did not have a theory specific to career choice, Erikson’s theory of adult development is also very relevant to this study. In the creation of his model of adult development which includes eight sequential and hierarchical stages and age ranges, Erikson (1963) described how social and historical factors contribute to and influence the course of an individual’s personality development as it goes through “critical steps –
critical being a characteristic of turning points, of moments of decision between progress and regression, in integration and retardation” (p. 270 – 271). In order for a person to move from stage to stage, he must find resolution of the conflicts and concerns most pertinent in each stage. According to Christensen (2003), three of the eight stages in Erikson’s model are relevant to career changers including second career teachers:

1. *Identity versus Role Confusion*, during which individuals struggle with the roles, including careers, that they have chosen for themselves;

2. *Intimacy versus Isolation*, which occurs during young adulthood when people are willing to commit themselves to meaningful relationships with others; and

3. *Generativity versus Stagnation*, the longest stage, lasting between the ages of 25 and 65, when adults are primarily interested in establishing and guiding the next generation.

These stages, according to Christensen, are relevant to second career teachers because they are helpful in understanding the motivations behind their decision to become teachers, which for many include a desire to give back to society and to make a difference with youth so as to impact the future of our country and the next generation.

Erikson’s stages are also helpful in understanding the struggle that second career teachers often have with the roles they have chosen for themselves in their first career and the decisions and sacrifices that they have to make in order to leave that career behind and pursue a career in teaching.
Theories of Career Development

Several other theorists have been recognized as developers of additional career theories over the years. Many of their theories are similar to one or several of those already mentioned, yet all have their own attributes and individual differences. In the early 1990s, however, a new idea, that of theory convergence, came on the scene. Although Osipow (1983) is credited with the concept of melding theories together, Sharf (1997) is recognized for his proposal of the application of this idea in the area of counseling and specifically with career development theories, and Savickas’ (1991) four-level model for comprehending career development is the most current work in the area of career development theory convergence (Chen, 2003). This new perspective towards career development represents a break from what many have labeled the traditional or “established theories” in the field, which focused more on positivist beliefs, and the idea of a one-way progression towards a continual higher goal within one’s same occupation. This new push towards “emerging theories,” those based on social constructivist ideology, views a career as a social construction “that reflects both individual actions and the person's interactions with others” (Brown & Brooks, 1996; Chen, 2003), a concept that is continually being changed and redefined. No longer are careers considered to be simple hierarchical one-way ladders, but instead they are seen as waves with ebbs and tides, successes and disappointments, periods of stability and change.

In conjunction with the restatement of several career theories to include a more constructivist concept of a career path, beginning in the early 1970s the research on adult development and the life cycle started to change from the historical thinking of life
structure as an orderly hierarchical ladder culminating with the end of adolescence to the idea that growth and development continue throughout one’s entire life (Freidus, 1989). In addition, education began to be seen as a life-long process, and one that occurred both in and out of school and the workplace, as changing career demands created an unending need for updated knowledge and skills (Freidus, 1989). For Levinson (1986) mid-life career change is seen as a positive step toward individual maturity and growth as an individual finds himself with the ability to engage his needs with those of society. As one develops and matures over time, what represents meaningful work at one point in his life may seem purposeless at another time (Freidus, 1992). The idea of changing careers has become much more accepted and understood in society as a whole. The next section of this chapter discusses this concept of career change and renewal and the literature that specifically addresses that topic.

Career Transitions

John Krumboltz’s (1979) Social Learning Theory as well as others discussed in this section may aid in explaining the reason people change their careers, some many times, throughout their lives. According to Krumboltz, there are four categories of factors that influence the career decision-making path for any individual: (a) *genetic endowment and special abilities* which are inherited qualities such as race, sex, and physical appearance; (b) *environmental conditions and events*, which include social, political, economic, and natural forces; (c) *learning experiences*, which include individual events and their consequences, as well as knowledge gained through observation or other means; (d) *task approach skills*, which include performance standards and values, work habits,
motivation, and other factors that influence outcomes (Brown & Brooks, 1990). According to research, there is no single factor that causes individuals to change careers at any specific time in their lives, but rather several, and a combination of a few or all of them can create a situation in a person’s life that will motivate him or her to look for a new occupation. These factors include, but are not limited to the following: financial support, self-concept, personal meaning, interests, and beliefs (Jones, 1992). With respect to Krumboltz’s theory (as well as those of others such as Super [1957, 1984, 1990] and Holland [1973, 1977]), these factors would affect three of the four categories which he believes ultimately cause the choice of a career. Throughout one’s lifetime, then, especially as these factors continually change, the individual will most likely modify where and in what he chooses to pursue employment.

Additional theories, such as those dealing with career exploration, have also sought to explain career change (Jones, 1992). According to the literature, some factors may actually lie in the career itself. “Today’s economic and technological situation makes it imperative for today’s worker to keep as many career options open as possible” (Jones, 1992, p. 50). Although written over a decade ago, this statement continues to be true today, as many of the jobs people presently have will most likely not exist in the years to come as they are replaced by technological advancements, and equivalently, there are many jobs which will be needed in the future that have not yet been created. Flexibility then is an attribute needed by today’s workers as they look for a career path not only to satisfy them personally and professionally but to provide them with continued security and success.
In recent years, especially in relation to the drastic economic changes in this country, job transition continues to be more and more common. “Today, relocation, downsizing, and reengineering are the business buzzwords reflecting the fact that career transitions and organizational change are characteristic of most people’s career histories” (Stoltz-Loike, 1995, p. 89). The recession currently characterizing the national economy, causing the curtailment of companies and the laying off of many skilled workers, has led to environmental factors that have forced many people to look for a new career. In light of this phenomenon, many career development theorists, as mentioned earlier, have begun to modify existing theories or to construct new ones in order to include these vocational shifts.

According to Bejian and Salomone (1995), the idea of “midlife renewal” was not officially recognized until Murphy and Burck identified it in 1976 and defined renewal as a period of doubt and self-examination that is often followed by a “renewed commitment” to one’s career, whether it be in the form of remaining in one’s current position or seeking a new one. Research has suggested that this stage of renewal is more the rule in today’s workforce rather than the exception (Bejian & Salomone, 1995; Nicholson & West, 1989; Thomas, 1981), and, as mentioned, theorists such as Bejian and Salomone have suggested adding this period as the sixth stage to Donald Super’s (1990) five stages of career development. They have begun to recognize the need for this “career renewal” phase, as more and more individuals find themselves reevaluating and changing their chosen career paths. “Bejian and Salomone’s consideration of an additional stage
within Super’s theory provides a sound rationale and explanation for acknowledging the greater turbulence in career development today” (Engels, 1995, p. 52).

According to Jones (1992), several factors facilitate job change: (a) the desire for more meaning and personal success from work; (b) dissatisfaction with boss and/or coworkers or impersonal work environments; (c) more flexible social attitudes toward career changing; (d) awareness by adults that life should be about continued growth and development; (e) the willingness of partners to help one another change careers. And whereas four of these factors involve the attitude of the individual or those within his or her specific social circle, the idea of societal acceptance of career change, a factor that one individual cannot cause or change by himself, is in actuality a rather significant factor in promoting career change for people in our current society. Instead of producing a negative opinion about the individual, “career shifts can be more productively viewed as the natural next step in a career pattern rather than a radical shift that in a sense forsakes all that the individual has accomplished previously” (Heddesheimer, 1976, p. 110). This acceptance allows the person to truly consider the occupational change as a possibility and to later voice that desire to a friend and/or spouse, who often then becomes an important support of the worker’s route to a new career.

In line with Holland’s theory (1973, 1977), Murray, Powers, and Havinghurst (1971) described work history as a creation of two dimensions, that of self and that of environment. In their work, they described four types of work histories: the routine career, which is characterized by the absence of career change, although it may include some job changes within the career; the self-determined career, which includes job
changes that the individual instigates due to the desire for more challenging, interesting, leisurely or economically advanced work; *the situationally determined career change*, in which job changes are entirely determined by the environment (factors include family change, job change, or societal change); and *the self-directed accommodation career*, which is characterized by people who shape their career path in the face of environmental pressure to change jobs.

When it comes to mid-career change, Herminia Ibarra (2003) in an interview about her research and her book, *Working Identity*, described people as one of three kinds:

Some never followed their passion because it didn’t make sense or they couldn’t make money doing it or their parents thought [it] was flaky . . . Most people, however, never made a choice. They didn’t know if they even had a passion—at least, they never found one. So they kind of bumped along . . . Then there were people who made pretty informed choices—but then the context changed. People began to feel they had no control over their environment. All of a sudden, things didn’t make sense. (Harvard Management Update, 2003, p. 9)

In her text, Ibarra discussed the process of self-discovery and its affects on career choice and transitions. She suggested that people do not repress their true identities, but rather have “multiple selves.” Most individuals, in Ibarra’s theory, begin by envisioning possibilities and then exploring how those would be pursued. She stated that role models and mentors are an important factor in actually making the occupational change as well,
as they can be supporters of an individual’s decision and the often difficult process of reevaluating and changing one’s life (Harvard Management Update, 2003).

The next section of this chapter examines the literature on a specific group of professionals that have made the decision to change careers, second career teachers, and their paths to the field of education as a career, as well as the research that has already been conducted on this growing subgroup of the nation’s teaching force.

**Literature on Second Career Teachers**

The concept of changing careers is not foreign to today’s modern worker. The idea of changing professions does not always have to be one of necessity either; it can be one of choice, as young workers grow and mature, and in doing so, reshape their attitudes, preferences, and personal and professional goals. As career shifting becomes progressively accepted in society, these career changers have even more encouragement and opportunity to seek new job opportunities in either similar or even radically different fields than the ones in which they currently work. Educators are no exception to this phenomenon, as many novice teachers begin in the classroom at the age of 21 and leave a few years later to follow other pursuits, whereas others leave business and industry, some after many years of employment, and find their new professional challenge in schools.

Over the next decade, it is estimated that approximately 1.5 million new teachers will be needed in order to place a licensed and qualified teacher in every classroom (Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc., 2008). As baby-boomers retire and many young teachers leave the profession in search of better pay and higher societal status, this need cannot be filled by traditional teachers alone. Late-entry or what are often labeled as
nontraditional or second career teachers constitute a growing population of instructors whose previous career is unrelated to education (Mayotte, 2001). These career changers are currently the fastest growing group of teacher education candidates (Basinger, 2000), and will most likely continue to be so as a growing amount of teachers are needed to service the high number of students enrolling in our nation’s schools. Colleges and universities across the country are developing programs that will enable these second career teacher candidates to fast track to the classroom. A review of current research by Lerner and Zittleman (2002) showed that approximately 30% of the teachers who graduated from teacher education programs in 1998 began their training at the post baccalaureate level. Other alternative licensure programs, promising immediate job placement and signing bonuses continue to be means to staff schools, especially those in urban America, with stable and licensed professionals. “The increasing number of career changers may well have a significant effect on the teacher shortage” (Crow et al., 1990, p. 220), and many researchers believe that the shortage of properly qualified and experienced teachers will only worsen unless teaching as a career can be made attractive to those looking to excel in a new profession (Serow & Forrest, 1994, as cited in Richardson & Watt, 2005).

The research on second career teachers was at its peak in the early 1990s as alternative certification and licensure programs trained and placed these nontraditional teachers into classrooms. Three major categories of research have emerged over the last 20 years and in this section of the chapter, I discuss each. First, I briefly discuss the research on the programs themselves. Secondly, I review the research on the motivation
to change careers and the decision to become a teacher as well as the benefits and disadvantages to hiring these teachers. Thirdly, I summarize the studies which focus on comparative investigations between traditional first career and nontraditional second career teachers. At the end of this section, I look closely at Frank Powers’ (2002) study, the investigation most parallel to this particular research project.

**Research on Alternative Programming**

As the demand for teachers increases across the country, more and more alternative paths to certification and licensure have been created and implemented as a means to attract those looking for a change of profession in the mid or later years of their lives. Some programs consist only of new recruitment strategies for enrollment in full teacher education programs; others create a true alternate route to classroom teaching and differ substantially from the regular preparation process in terms of both the standards and the methods of teacher preparation and induction (Darling-Hammond, 1990, 1999, 2001; Darling-Hammond, Chung, & Frelow, 2002; Ruckel, 2000). In addition, as the disparities between programs in different states grow, the reciprocity of licensure between states is steadily diminishing which ironically, then, increases the demand for emergency and alternative licensure provisions so that there can be a qualified teacher in each classroom (Darling-Hammond, 1990, 2001; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002). In 1990 Linda Darling-Hammond approached the task of defining alternative licensure:

> In sum, the concept of “alternatives” to traditional state certifications leaves a great deal of room for varied meaning. It can mean alternative *ways to meet* teacher certification requirements—such as a graduate level master’s degree
program rather than an undergraduate teacher education program. It can mean alternative standards for certification, which allow for truncated or reduced training—or for training completed during the course of a teaching career rather than prior to its initiation. Or it can mean alternatives to state certification itself, as when a state allows local employers to train and certify their own candidates.

(p. 129)

And with such a large amount of programs developing across the nation, a great amount of educational research has been dedicated to investigating these programs and those teachers graduating from them so as to evaluate if they are actually producing prepared and qualified educators.

One common finding among researchers is that teachers who pass through fast paced alternate certification programs have difficulty with regard to curriculum, teaching methodology, and dealing with students both behaviorally and with their academic differences (Feiman-Nemser & Parker, 1990; Grossman, 1989). This difficulty has been found to lead to less satisfaction with their job than those fully trained beginning teachers (Lutz & Hutton, 1989). Many researchers do distinguish these fast pace alternative programs, however, from what they term as the alternate route programs, which most often are master’s degree programs that attract professionals from other careers who are simply looking for a change in occupation and who report a much higher percentage of intention to remain in the teaching field (Darling-Hammond, 1990).

Research on specific programs can vary greatly, and the results as well, often depending on which organization is sponsoring the evaluation of the program. Programs
such as Project Promise, a 10-month program for mid-career professionals, and Teachers for Chicago, a program that links coursework to supervised internships in the Chicago city schools, have been examined and found that 75% or more of their graduates feel successful in the classroom and plan to remain in teaching, whereas on the other hand, evaluations for Teach for America, a 3- to 8-week summer program that places teachers in urban or rural classrooms, show that 58% of its graduates had left teaching by the third year (Darling-Hammond, 1999).

Justice, Greiner, and Spencer (2003) surveyed former Texas A & M University–Commerce students who completed the traditional teacher education program and those who went through the Emergency Certification program as a means to determine if there was a significant difference in the attrition rate of the two groups of graduates. Their findings indicated that overall, the traditional program graduates felt that they were significantly better prepared to teach as they completed their induction year in the classroom. They also found that only 40% of the Emergency Certification program participants, compared to 88% of the traditionally trained teachers, said that they would choose the same program again. Finally, 17% of those who went through the Emergency Certification said they would not teach again under the same circumstances and 10% said they were undecided. As for the traditionally prepared teachers, 8% stated they would not teach again and only 7% were undecided, leaving the researchers to predict that the attrition rate of those in the Emergency Certification program would most likely be higher, stating a variety of factors including inadequate teacher preparation and the lack
of student teaching experiences, two serious shortcomings of their Emergency Certification training program.

As both the demand for teachers and the number of second career pre-service teacher candidates increase, a growing number of alternate certification and licensure programs will most likely continue to be created as well. Educational researchers will persist, then, in their efforts to study these programs so as to improve their quality and effectiveness in producing qualified teachers for the nation’s classrooms.

Motivational Studies

A substantive amount of educational research has gone to investigating what leads people to choose a profession in education, especially those who have already found success in a different occupation. As more and more individuals follow this path to working in schools with today’s youth, researchers and teacher educators feel that it is imperative to know their motivations so as to be able to better prepare them for the job as a classroom teacher.

Through their research studies with second career educators, Crow et al. (1990) have developed three categories to describe second career pre-service teachers: (a) *homecomers*, those who see education as a return to the career they had always wanted to pursue but for some reason or another were unable to do so; (b) *converted*, those who turn to teaching for the first time after a “pivotal event” or “confluence of factors” that have caused them to reconsider their first choice of profession, and then find satisfaction in teaching as a career; and (c) *unconverted*, those who have joined the teaching force after achieving high status in another career and then become quickly “disenchanted”
with education as a profession while either continuing to teach or choosing to leave the profession for other pursuits.

Research has found that specific reasons for choosing education as a career are numerous. As mentioned, many second career educators are recruited through the growing number of university and alternative programs particularly designed for the nontraditional student, especially as the demand for qualified teachers increases annually. For others, the desire to help young people is a common theme (Chambers, 2002). “Often with children of their own, second career teachers are older and more mature, venturing to make teaching a ‘vocation’ rather than a ‘job’” (Novak & Knowles, 1992, as cited in Powers, 2002, p. 304). This idea of altruism or service, the concept of giving back to one’s community, is a common theme among second career teachers, as many believe that their first profession was overly focused on pursuing personal gain and monetary status. In the mature years of their lives, however, as they progress through what Erikson (1963) termed the Identity versus Role Confusion stage when they question the roles they have chosen for themselves, including their careers, and later the Generativity versus Stagnation stage of his adult development model, when they begin to reevaluate their past and what they have accomplished, they often turn to service professions as their way to give back to society and to make a difference in the lives of others, a means to leave behind a legacy of some nature.

Lerner and Zittleman (2002) examined 16 male and female career changers enrolled or recently graduated from a teacher education program and found through a series of structured surveys that most of their participants when choosing their first
occupations considered teaching “an unintellectual and easy major” and thought that the teaching profession was characterized by “poor pay and lack of respect” (p. 8), all of which deterred them from enrolling in a pre-service teaching program as undergraduates. Only later when they “desired to make a difference and to pursue meaningful work” (p. 10), did they decide to leave their first chosen career and become educators. This aspiration to have a positive influence on today’s youth, and to put personal financial gain aside, is a very common motive for people to leave high-paying business and industry professions and to join a service profession such as teaching.

Perceived self-benefits such as autonomy in the classroom, the idea of steady employment, and regular hours are also factors of attraction especially for those career changers coming from business or industry (Chambers, 2002; Chin & Young, 2007; Lortie, 1975; Serow, 1993). In addition, alignment of work schedules with life styles, especially when family is considered, has been identified as an important factor for motivating an individual to join the teaching profession (Tigchelaar, Brouwer, & Korthagen, 2008).

Serow (1993) conducted a study of 26 prospective second career teachers and the reasons why they chose teaching as a career. In much the same way as Crow et al. (1990), Serow described four categories into which he placed each participant of his study based on the relationship between the decision to teach and other dimensions of life experience. His four categories were as follows: extenders, those interested in teaching because of some prior work or personal experience; subject-oriented, those who saw teaching as a chance to work in a specific academic or vocational area; practical, those
who entered teaching for security or scheduling advantages; rectifiers, those who saw their first career decisions as errors and often attempts to please others such as parents or peers. With respect to the numbers in his study, over half of the participants fell into the extender or the rectifier categories (a combination of which would be Crow et al.’s homecomers), which supports the research that a majority of second career teachers enter their new profession with altruistic intentions and the desire to make a difference by giving back to society (Freidus, 1994; Hapit, 1987-1988; Novak & Knowles, 1992; Powers, 2002).

A more recent look at career change to teaching by Priyadharshini and Robinson-Pant (2003) classified participants into six categories based on the narratives of their 34 participants (22 women and 12 men) and the most recent job experience prior to enrolling in a teacher education program. They are as follows: the parent, mostly women, and many of whom had also worked outside of the home or even part-time from home, but saw their role as parent as the focal point of their career, therefore choosing teaching because they saw it as a more “family-friendly” career than their previous ones; the successful careerist, those who had done well in industry or business and fully realized “the risk” they were taking in moving from an established career which included a drop in salary and status, but chose teaching either because they felt they had achieved their goals in their first career or had discovered that the nature of their career had changed drastically over the years and they were looking for an “antidote to careers that left [them] feeling alienated, isolated, bored or ‘empty’” (p. 102); the freelancer, those participants who had followed a single career, but were often employed on an insecure
short-term basis which required a lot of relocation and reassignment, causing them to eventually want a more stable and secure career such as teaching; the late starter, those who entered the job market directly after finishing high school and later returned to the university for teacher preparation, many looking from a career with secure salary and pension provisions; the serial careerist, those participants who moved frequently from career to career, having several short and successful careers, but attracted to teaching, once again, for the security and long-term benefits; and the young career changer, those who explored different temporary careers for several years, but eventually settled for teaching as it is more “suitable” than their previous employments.

Similar motivational studies have also found that second career teachers’ earlier experiences influence how they teach and in what ways they learn to deal with the working conditions in their new profession. Eifler and Potthoff (1998) looked at 40 different studies conducted on second career teachers and found a common theme in the transfer of skills and attributes from one’s first profession to teaching, suggesting that teacher education programs should look at the ways in which they address and incorporate its teacher candidates’ past experiences and previous professions in their training for the classroom. Mayotte (2001) found in her study that previous career influences on adaptation to teaching and classroom practice could be categorized into three areas: know-why competencies, which include career motivation, personal meaning, and identification, all of which help the second career teacher identify his or her reasons for coming to the teaching profession; know-how competencies, which include the specific skills, abilities, and occupation related knowledge that the teachers had
developed while working their first jobs and that they now utilize in their teaching; and *know-whom competencies*, which include networks, mentoring relations, and social contacts. One other interesting finding in the Mayotte study is the fact that while the teachers came to teaching with a wide set of positive competencies and experience, they still noted the need for support, as they acknowledged that they are novices in the field of education.

Research states that the schools themselves are benefiting in many ways as second career teachers bring a new dimension to the classroom. According to Crow et al. (1990), commitment to the profession is one of the most important gains. “These [teachers] describe teaching as a deliberate occupational choice [often] in contrast to previous occupational decisions. The deliberateness of their decision to teach should contribute to the strength of their commitment” (p. 210). Freidus (1992) found the same results in her research with second career teachers stating that the sense of greater commitment arises from the fact that these career changers have often reassessed their priorities and goals and in the end, “they become teachers by choice and not by default” (p. 5). Gonzales Rodriguez and Sjostrom (1998) discovered that whereas second career teachers had well articulated reasons for choosing to teach, many of the first-career teachers in their study showed doubts about working in schools.

Other benefits for schools include having employees who are agents of reform, as most second career teachers come to the profession with a desire to make a significant contribution to the betterment of the system as a whole, and hiring teachers with the “potential to invigorate the teaching of academic subject matter” (Novak & Knowles,
1992, p. 3), since most second career teachers enter the classroom with extensive knowledge in their subject area (Chambers, 2002). In addition, according to a study conducted by Freidus (1992), few career changers enter teaching expecting to find an easier workload. In fact, most second career teachers see teaching as purposeful work, “a means of imparting social values, of imbuing children with the moral and intellectual foundations related to responsible citizenship” (p. 12). In other words, they come to the profession with not only the desire to change the state of the world, but with the belief that they can do it one classroom and one year at a time. Finally, there has been some evidence that due to their prior work experience, second career teachers may be more adept at dealing with certain aspects of teaching, such as the bureaucracy surrounding education and daily tasks such as record keeping and other types of paperwork (Novak & Knowles, 1992; Spencer & Tinajero, 1989).

On the negative side, however, is the research that finds that with the strong sense of mission and the aspiration to change the world often associated with second career teachers comes a heightened chance of disenchantment (Freidus, 1994; Crow et al., 1990). Freidus (1992) found that a common theme among the participants in her study was that they had underestimated how difficult teaching actually was and that while they may be more skilled at handling it, many were surprised at the amount of bureaucracy and politics that characterized their new profession, thinking that these were issues they had left behind in their previous careers. This means that the assumption underlying alternative certification programs, that having experience with previous careers and coming to the profession at a more mature age enable career changers to attain
professional teaching competence at a faster rate, may be a problematic one (Tigchelaar et al., 2008), thus questioning the length of the many abbreviated training programs most often associated with alternative licensure.

**Comparative Studies**

Many research studies have been conducted on the preparation and the induction years of second career teachers as they transition from their first career, through their teacher education programs, and into a school setting. In addition, the majority of these studies examine this process by comparing it with traditional first career teachers and their experiences with teacher preparation and the first few years of being in a classroom.

One such study was conducted in 2003 by Wayman et al. The researchers surveyed 237 traditional first year teachers and 154 second career first year teachers about their areas of concern as beginning teachers, and found both similarities and differences between the two groups. With regard to matters that caused them concern, both groups of teachers ranked the issues in a similar order, the most stressful one dealing with effective instruction and the least stressful dealing with collegial relationships or school culture issues. The researchers did find, however, that although the order of their concerns was similar, that in almost every area, but most particularly in the areas of lesson planning and classroom management, the second career teachers were two to four times more likely to be concerned with their own preparation and effectiveness. The recommendation, then, of the researchers, was for alternative licensure and certification programs to evaluate and improve their preparation programs prior to placing second career teachers in the classroom.
In a similar study, Gonzales Rodriguez and Sjostrom (1998) conducted a comparative study between 25 traditional first year teachers and 18 second career first year teachers and found that the second career teachers were much more student centered as opposed to curriculum centered in regard to their instruction and interactions with their classes during their first year on the job. About the same time, Powell (1997) had conducted a cross-case analysis of two first year teachers, one first career and one second career, and found that although the second career teacher came to the classroom with much greater content knowledge, including real-world anecdotes and examples of the subject area, both teachers, by the end of the school year, had created a curriculum that was essentially textbook centered, a concept that they both had denounced before classes began. According to Powell, the first career teacher followed the textbook as a way to make up for her lack of content knowledge, whereas the second career teacher was “faced with obstacles that [he] perceived as barriers to implementing the kind of instruction he deemed effective” (p. 353). Powell described these obstacles as those questionable but often typical practices that some schools demonstrate, such as giving beginning teachers the least motivated students as well as classrooms with limited or no resources and facilities.

Pellettieri (2003) compared first career and second career teachers with respect to their experiences during their first year of teaching with their building administrators. The study was conducted in an effort to identify individual needs and support structures that would most likely benefit each group as other researchers have linked job
satisfaction and retention to satisfaction with principal leadership and support (Shann, 1998).

Comparative studies on second career teachers not only contrast them with their traditional first career counterparts, but some researchers have investigated gender differences within the subgroup of late entry educators. One such example is Freidus (1989, 1990) who conducted in-depth case studies on four subjects, two men and two women, each from different age levels, in order to investigate gender and its relation to career choice, most specifically that of teaching as a second career. Her results indicated that biography affects career motivation and performance and that gender socialization has a significant influence on who becomes teachers and on what is taught and how it is presented to students. Freidus’ research suggests, like that of many other researchers, that teacher education programs, as well as school administrators, reevaluate their training and induction programs in an effort to include aspects of these teachers past experiences and professions as a means to better enable them to be successful and therefore remain in the classroom.

In contrast to the many benefits that second career teachers bring to schools, research does support an unfavorable side to second career teaching as well. Knowles and Hoefler (1989) found that those nontraditional teachers who did not find success in the field were often hindered by their perspectives on education, which were largely embedded in their personal histories and past experiences, and, unfortunately, these issues were not addressed during their teacher preparation program (Novak & Knowles, 1992). Another issue that may create a challenge for second career teachers is that of the
actual transition into teaching. Madfes (1990) found that for a variety of reasons, the nontraditional beginning teachers in her study had “greater problems” in their first year of teaching than those graduates of traditional age. These problems ranged from issues with classroom management and discipline, to what many teachers described as unmotivated and apathetic students. Eifler and Potthoff (1998) stated that although they found in their review of literature that often skills and competencies from previous careers were often transferred to teaching, they may not necessarily be the same competencies needed in the classroom. Bullough and Knowles (1990) suggested that the long length of time that often separates the second career teacher’s teaching experience from his or her own secondary schooling experience causes the new teacher to become quickly overwhelmed by the complex day-to-day teaching situation. In a sense, they have idealized the teaching, and when faced with the complex reality of what the profession entails, they are often surprised and rather challenged. “These experiences may also encumber the individual with feelings of frustration, doubt, and despair” (Powers, 2002, p. 305).

**Significance of This Study**

As previously mentioned, the literature supports strongly that there are numerous motives behind the decision to teach as a second career. The literature also indicates that the majority of second career teachers join the profession with “some kind of personal transformative goal” (Novak & Knowles, 1992, p. 31), such as moving from the business arena and the pursuit of personal gain to making a difference in society and the future of its youth. In addition, research shows that the decision to leave one’s career and become a teacher is one that is most often taken seriously and thoughtfully, often after reading
about, listening to, or even having personal experiences in which one had assumed the role of the teacher (Freidus, 1992). Whereas the literature also supports both definite advantages and possible detriments to the introduction of these new teachers to the classroom, further research is needed. Many questions are still unanswered and much perplexity still exists with regard to second career teachers as a subgroup of the teaching population. While the number of second career teachers continues to grow, research has focused primarily on either the teacher preparation programs (Darling-Hammond, 1990, 2001; Eifler & Potthoff, 1998), the motivational factors for career change (Crow et al., 1990; Freidus, 1994; Serow, 1993), or a comparison between second career and traditional teachers’ experiences as they were prepared and then inducted into the classroom (Bullough & Knowles, 1990; Chambers, 2002; Novak & Knowles, 1992). In addition, little research has been conducted with second career teachers as they continue to work in their classrooms or leave teaching to pursue a third occupation, yet they continue to make up a large faction of the nation’s teachers, and can be very helpful in continuing to better prepare other second career teachers for the task of working with today’s students. The following section describes one study that did take a look at second career teachers a few years after their induction to the classroom, and is the research most parallel to this research study.

**Powers’ Study**

In 2002, Frank Powers conducted an investigation of second career teachers who were beyond their preparation programs and first year of teaching. For his study, Powers interviewed seven second career teachers in their third year on the job. All of the
teachers lived in the state of Washington, and all had completed a bachelor’s degree or higher in a field other than education and had then worked successfully in one or more careers before going back to school to become teachers. In addition, all of the teachers had experienced a substantial drop in salary with the career change.

The purpose of Powers’ (2002) study was to inform administrators as how to better support this unique group of teachers as new educators in their buildings. Powers interviewed every teacher three times. Each interview lasted for a period of 50-90 minutes and was later transcribed, which allowed the participants to make corrections or changes if necessary. Powers questioned each participant about his or her path to the teaching profession, including life-changing events and other factors that influenced his or her career decisions, the differences between the teacher’s previous career and teaching, as well as his or her challenges and personal mission in the classroom. He did not, however, question them specifically about their current job satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

Through his study, Powers (2002) found that the majority of his participants questioned their choice of profession after what they described as a very tumultuous first year of teaching, having been faced with both discipline problems and many unmotivated students. In fact, the participants’ greatest perceived challenge centered on the lack of student involvement and motivation toward their own learning, an issue that surprised the participants tremendously as they began their tenure in the classroom. For several of the teachers, frustration with students resulted in fatigue and physical exhaustion which in turn caused them to question their desire to return the following school year.
The overall perception of the administrators by the second career teachers in Powers’ (2002) study was not favorable either. Lack of both support and perceived leadership abilities by the administration was a frustration and a challenge mentioned by all of Powers’ participants, as each one was previously employed in either a supervisory or highly collaborative job. Many perceived that their past experiences in their previous careers enabled them to notice what they perceived as flaws of the administrators quite quickly and easily. These flaws included lack of direction and the absence of collaborative decision-making, as well as either the inability or the unwillingness to find the time to get to know their teachers personally. The participants were even further discouraged since as teachers, they were now in a position that did not allow for them to comment on nor correct what they saw as problems in the school.

Powers (2002) also noted, however, that all participants, now in their third year of teaching, had left behind their doubts after the first year and now planned to remain in the classroom. They made this decision based on the personal missions that each had when entering the profession years earlier. They came to teaching not as simple employees; they selected teaching thoughtfully and saw it as a vocation, not just as a job. They wanted to make a positive difference in the classroom, and “they all maintained a pristine hope of contributing to humanity through the education of their students” (p. 312). Each had discussed ways in which he or she was dealing with the frustrations they found in schools, both with the students and their administrations, and all of them expected to stay in the classroom for many years to come.
Value of This Study

Whereas numerous studies have been conducted on second career teachers over the last two decades, there is still a large gap in the literature on this subgroup of teachers even as they continue to grow in numbers and in relevance in the nation’s teaching force. The gap in the research is characterized by the lack of study on second career teachers beyond their years of preparation and induction into schools. Once they become members of a school faculty, second career teachers are seemingly grouped with their first career colleagues in educational research and literature. This research study begins to fill that gap in the literature. The participants in this study are all second career teachers who have been teaching five or more years. This study attempts to begin to fill an additional gap in the literature on second career teachers, their perceptions of their choice of education as their profession. As discussed earlier, many studies have investigated the motivations behind the decision to become a teacher, but few, if any researchers, have examined how that decision is perceived several years after the fact. While in his study Powers (2002) discussed the future of his participants and their plans to remain in education despite the challenges they have found in the classroom, the purpose of his study was not to explore his participants’ perceptions of their career choice but rather to investigate their relationship with their administrators.

In this research study, I specifically aimed to find out how second career teachers perceived their decision to become teachers. I wanted to know if they felt that they made the right choice to change careers and to become a teacher. I also wanted to know if they had plans to continue working in schools, and if so, why. If they do not intend to stay, I
wanted to know why they were choosing to leave. By conducting this investigation into second career teachers’ perceptions of their career change and selection, I will add to the literature on teacher education as this subgroup of teachers continues to grow and become a significant part of pre-service teaching programs and the teaching force as a whole. By understanding their perceptions on their choice to become teachers, especially years after they have made that choice, a time in their career when they can be more reflective on that decision, teacher educators, administrators, and mentors, can better prepare and support this group of teachers for continued success in their programs and schools.

The next chapter of this study, Chapter 3, provides a detailed description of the methodology used in this study, including the rationale for the research paradigm, specific methodology for participant selection, data collection and data analysis.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methodology used in this study. It begins with the purpose of the study and the research questions. The chapter also includes the rationale of the research paradigm, as well as the methods used to choose participants, to collect data, and to analyze the data. Possible design limitations are also discussed.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of career choice of second career teachers currently in at least their fifth year of work in the classroom and the factors that influenced these perceptions. The main research question and sub-questions of this study were:

What perceptions do second career teachers have of their choice of profession?

1. What factors influence these perceptions?

2. Do they perceive that they made the “right” decision?

3. What factors influence their decision to remain in or leave the teaching profession?

4. What are the similarities and differences between the perceptions of secondary level and primary level teachers?

I hope to inform second career teacher education programs as well as current school personnel so as to help better prepare and support those professionals entering the field of education as a second or even third vocational choice. As teachers advance in
their careers beyond the chaotic first and second years in the classroom, they can still offer a wealth of information and insight toward their preparation and how programs could and should be improved to better serve nontraditional pre-service teacher candidates. In addition, these second career teachers can enlighten their peers, administrators, and other school employees about how their experiences differ from that of traditional first career teachers, all with the hope of improving their preparation for, transition to, and tenure in the classroom.

**Rationale of Research Paradigm**

This research study adopted a qualitative design and utilized in-depth interviewing (Hatch, 2002) and critical incident analysis (Flanagan, 1954, 1982; Stitt-Gohdes, Lambrecht, & Redmann, 2000) in order to collect data about the participants’ perceptions with changing careers, their perceptions about the decision to choose teaching as their second career, and their plans for remaining in or leaving the field of education.

A qualitative method was chosen for this study because the open-ended nature of the qualitative method provided opportunity to collect data on the concrete details needed for understanding the participants’ perceptions of their career choice. The goal of the study was to understand the participants’ decisions about their career from their own frame of reference (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992) and to present a detailed view of those perceptions (Creswell, 1998), a process that was achievable by the use of qualitative methodology, specifically in-depth interviewing, as the participants shared their experiences through detailed description and dialogue with the researcher. Transcripts of
the interviews were then read, reread, coded, and analyzed for commonalities and differences across participants. As is common in qualitative research, I did not begin this study with a hypothesis to prove, but rather found the commonalities and differences inductively among the participants’ perceptions within their comments and stories.

Guba and Lincoln (1998) described in-depth interviews as “extended conversations,” through which the interviewer builds a relationship of trust and rapport with the participants who share their stories about their experiences. For this study, the conversations with the participants were the main source of data. Even though they were considered conversations, there were some striking differences between these research interviews and a typical friendly conversation. These differences included: (a) less balance with regard to turn taking, with the participant speaking much more at length than the researcher; (b) repeating replaced the normal rule of avoiding repetition, with the researcher often paraphrasing and checking comprehension; and (c) expansion replaced abbreviation, as the researcher encouraged the participant to tell more not less, and to go into more detail, not less (Spradley, 1979). As the interviewer, I asked open-ended questions, encouraged informants to explain and to elaborate on their unique perspectives, and listened intently to each participant (Hatch, 2002). In addition, as in most qualitative interviews, I entered into each interview with guiding questions (Hatch, 2002), but also generated probing, clarifying, and follow-up questions during each interview in response to the participant’s discussion of the topic at hand, as the emphasis of each interview was to understand the participant’s points of view, not to just simply get through the questions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Hatch, 2002).
Critical incident analysis is an adapted form of the critical incident technique developed by Flanagan (1954, 1982) in his attempt to capture the complexity of one’s job behavior in terms of the social context in which the job took place. “It is particularly well suited for examining events considered to be examples of success and failure” (Redmann, Lambrecht, & Stitt-Gohdes, 2000, p. 132). It has been used in the business world to focus on an employee’s individual perceptions of instances in his or her work experiences that are examples of either effective or problematic aspects of his or her job. In this study, the construct of critical incident analysis led to be a requirement that the participants keep a written log of and later describe events or conversations which occurred not only in their classrooms but also in their daily interactions with peers or other society members that either confirmed or conflicted with their decision to become a teacher.

The design of this study was emergent and flexible (Hatch, 2002). This is typical of qualitative studies as each has its own distinctive nature that develops and often changes as the study is carried out (Hatch, 2002). At the onset of this study, changes in its design were expected and welcomed as data was collected and analyzed. During the interview process, transcripts were written, data were analyzed, and of recursive analysis and data collection as well as participant member checking is common in qualitative studies (Hatch, 2002; Wolcott, 1994) and is then the basis for any changes to the format of the study itself.
Human Subjects Review

Prior to collecting any data or searching for any participants, an application for approval to use human research participants was submitted and approved by Kent State University’s Institutional Review Board (Appendix A). A consent form (Appendix B) was then given to each participant. The form fully described the study and explained the rights of the participant, including anonymity and the right to withdraw from the study at any point without penalty. To ensure the anonymity of the participants, pseudonyms were used in all documents related to this study, including this dissertation. A consent form (Appendix C) was also presented for permission to audiotape and to transcribe the interview sessions. At no point in the study were children observed or recorded, nor were participants compensated for their participation.

Participants

According to Kvale (1996), a researcher needs to interview as many participants as necessary in order to find out what she needs to know. In a qualitative study, data collection can end when the researcher finds herself with saturated data, meaning that the researcher has come to a point when she is not finding new data, but rather continual confirmation of the data already collected (Creswell, 1998). Hatch (2002) referred to it as “redundancy” of data and also uses it as a gauge as to when the researcher has collected enough data for her study. I chose to begin this study with eight participants because I believed that eight participants would provide enough data to answer my research questions. I chose to conduct three interviews with each participant, because I believed that eight participants with three interviews apiece would give me redundancy of
data. I knew, however, as I collected and analyzed my data that the number of needed participants might need to change. If, for example, I were to find that I needed to further investigate a common theme or an idea from an earlier interview, I may have decided that the best avenue to do so would have been to add additional interviews with the current participants; on the other hand, the best solution may have been to have added participants to the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Seidman, 1991). Neither of these were the case, however, as I found my research to be complete after conducting the originally planned interviews.

I used criterion sampling (Hatch, 2002) to identify participants for my research. Criterion sampling occurs when the researcher in advance of the study selects specific criteria that each of her potential candidates needs to meet to qualify as participants in the study. The criteria for participation in this study were:

1. Each participant had to be a second career teacher. In this study a second career teacher was defined as an individual who had earned a college or university degree in an area other than education.

2. Each participant had to have worked in a career other than education for a minimum of five years before deciding to be a teacher.

3. Each participant had to have been truly invested in his or her first career, meaning that he or she made some sort of perceived sacrifice, whether financial or status wise, to leave his or her first profession and pursue teaching. In other words, it was not a trouble-free decision.

4. Each participant had to have been in at least their fifth year of teaching.
In 2005, I conducted a pilot study on the subject of second career teachers. I interviewed four individuals in my school building that had earned degrees in areas other than teaching. The purpose of the study was to understand why the participants decided to leave their first career and to become an educator. Three of my participants had worked in their first career for five years or more. One of the teachers had entered the workforce for only two years and then decided to go back to college to become a teacher. After conducting the three interviews with each participant required for the study, it was clear to both myself and the particular participant that having only spent two years in her first profession, she did not view teaching as a true second career choice, even though she went through an alternative licensure route to get to the classroom. Her original degree was in English, and for two years she worked as a journalist for various publications. She stated that her experiences for those two years enabled her to travel and have certain personal freedoms with regard to time and working environments, and that teaching, in her view, was more of a delayed first career rather than a true second career (Wiehe, 2005). For this current study, then, I decided to look for teachers who were truly vested in a first career other than education so that their choice of teaching would be a genuine career change. I used the criterion of five years, and I set this minimum to try to ensure that the participants made an attempt to work successfully in their first career before making the decision to abandon that field and to turn to teaching.

An additional criterion for the selection of my participants was that they were in at least their fifth year of teaching. I chose five years of teaching experience as a minimum because Powers (2002) noted that teachers, by this time in their career, can
have a more reflective discussion about their perceptions and goals, as they are not entrenched and distracted by the stresses that come with the first year or two of teaching. They are more relaxed and confident in their work and can speak with much more clarity.

In addition to these criteria, I was also looking for four elementary school and four secondary school teachers to participate in the study, as one of my research questions specifically asked about the differences and similarities between these two subgroups of teachers with regard to their perceptions of their career choice. Therefore, I wanted an equal number of elementary school and secondary school teachers in order to look for these differences and similarities if they did exist. For this study, elementary school teachers were defined as teaching grades 1 through 6 and secondary school teachers as those teachers teaching grades 7 through 12.

I found my participants through contacts in my current school district, through the district where my own children attended school, and through other doctoral candidates in my program at Kent State University. I had never met any of my participants before, none of them had taught or would teach any of my children during the study, and none were my colleagues from my school district. Presumably, this social distance allowed my findings to be more ethical and trustworthy, as the participants did not feel socially pressured to impress me or somehow give me the answers that they felt I wanted or needed to complete my research.

I began looking for potential candidates in May, 2008. At a curriculum council meeting in my own district, I presented my research topic and asked anyone who knew of viable participants to contact me. Two of my colleagues forwarded me names of
prospective candidates. My next attempt to find participants was at the end of the year festival at my son’s school. I asked both his teacher and his principal if they knew of anyone who could be a participant in my study. The principal offered two suggestions, one in the same district, but different elementary school as my children, and one in a neighboring district. My third source for potential candidates was an email sent out to various peer doctoral candidates. One colleague returned the names of two possible candidates. I was able to identify several participants from these referrals.

Once each possible participant was identified, I suggested that the referral person contact him or her first or I contacted the possible participant by email. This less personal first communication allowed each participant to decline to participate without pressure or insult to me personally. I wanted to make sure that the participants were going to work with me by their own choice, without feeling like they had to participate because they knew someone and wanted to do him or her a favor. Once each candidate agreed to participate in the study through email, I then contacted each by phone, and we discussed the study briefly. We then set a time for me to either call back later in the summer or to meet in late July or early August. This was done in order to complete the first round of interviews before school began for the year.

Although the study began with eight participants, only seven completed the process. One participant removed himself from the study after the first interview. He was in his 11th year of teaching, having taught both fourth and fifth grade, and planned to move to the junior high the next school year and also increase his district responsibilities to include the head soccer coaching job at the high school. During the first interview, I
learned that he had joined the military after high school and then attended college where he earned a degree in business. Upon graduation, he worked in politics for several years as a campaign correspondent for several mayoral and council member candidates. Growing tired of the political lifestyle, he decided to turn to teaching as his next venture.

While I felt that our first interview went well and without incident, I never received a response to my requests for a second interview. I contacted him several times both at work and at home, both through email and phone calls. Additionally, I sent him the transcript of our first interview with a short handwritten letter asking him to contact me to either schedule a second interview or to formally withdraw from the study. When I never received a reply to any of these efforts to communicate with him, I decided to stop trying to reach him and to assume that he wanted to withdraw from the research study. Due to the timing of his withdrawal, and the timing of the other participant interviews, I believed that it was unnecessary to replace him in the study.

**Elementary School Participants**

Linda was teaching first grade, and at the time of the study she was in her sixth year of teaching. Her first university degree was in fashion merchandising. She worked for seven years in the retail business, and she also worked from home for several years while her children were very young.

Craig taught third grade and was also in his sixth year of teaching during the time of the study. He was employed for 13 years in the fuel industry during which time he earned his Masters in Business Administration degree. He began his career in marketing,
moved on to sales, and eventually earned an executive position where he remained until he left the business world altogether.

Jeff was teaching fifth grade and had been in education for 10 years when he participated in this study. His original university degree was in Medieval European History. After graduation, he worked for the university’s admission office, then a series of other odd jobs. In 1987, he secured a position at a small agency where he began his very successful nine-year career in advertising.

**Secondary School Participants**

Jennifer was in her sixth year of teaching English to high school seniors during this study. She tried more than once to become a teacher as an undergraduate university student but was met with a variety of obstacles. Her first university degree was in English, and after graduation, she immediately enrolled in a master’s program earning a degree in English as well. Upon graduation, she worked as a journalist for five years first for a newspaper and later for a trade magazine.

Cindy was also a sixth year teacher, teaching English and writing classes to high school seniors. She is also the instructor for several dual-credit classes, working in conjunction with a local university in her area. Her first profession was as a paralegal. She worked for five years in this field and for two different law firms.

Todd taught sophomore and senior English and was in his sixth year of teaching as well during the study. Before teaching, he was a youth pastor for seven years. He had always enjoyed working with teens and has found that his new profession in many ways is quite similar to his first one.
Don, who was a 14-year teaching veteran at the time of the study, taught advanced placement high school chemistry and biology classes and coached basketball for a local college. He decided to become a teacher after building a successful practice as an optometrist. He left the medical field after having grown weary of the hours and the business issues related to insurance and other aspects of his practice.

**Review of the Participants**

Table 1 provides a brief overview of the seven participants, their first career choices, as well as the number of years they were in that career, the number of years they have been in the classroom, and the grade level they are currently teaching.

**Data Collection**

The data in this study were collected through three in-depth interviews with each participant, all of which were digitally recorded, and two of which were transcribed and returned to the participants for member checking. This section of the chapter describes this method in detail.

I conducted three 60–90 minute tape-recorded interviews with each of my participants. The interviews were all formal in structure in that they took place at a set time and place, and I, as the researcher, conducted each interview as suggested by Hatch (2002). Settings for the interviews varied, from the participant’s home, to a coffee shop near his or her home, and even to his or her classroom or school library after school hours. Seidman (1991) suggested a minimum of three days to a week between interviews; this length of time allows for the participants to have time to “mull over” the preceding interview but not enough time for them to lose the “connection” between the two. I
Table 1

Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>First career</th>
<th>Number of years in first career</th>
<th>Number of years teaching</th>
<th>Current grade level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>Fashion merchandising; Special events coordinator; Retail manager</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craig</td>
<td>Marketing/MBA</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeff</td>
<td>Advertising/Marketing</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>English 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>Paralegal</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>English 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Todd</td>
<td>Youth pastor</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>English 10 and 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don</td>
<td>Optometrist</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Chemistry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

interviewed my participants three times over a 10-month period. Since my study relied on the data collected from these interviews, communicating with my participants over this length of time also facilitated the development of trust and rapport between me and each of the participants. According to Erickson (1986), these attributes are essential to the trustworthiness of any qualitative study. “Trust and rapport in fieldwork are not simply a matter of niceness; a noncoercive, mutually rewarding relationship with key informants is essential if the researcher is to gain valid insights into the informant’s point
of view” (p. 142). For this study, I needed to develop this relationship with each participant, as I relied on their openness and candidness for all of my data. These relationships were an integral factor in establishing credibility for my findings.

Due to the amount of data that was collected in this study, the time it took to transcribe each interview, as well as the recursive process of data analysis and data collection which was utilized, the interviews were several weeks apart, with the first round taking place between July 18th and September 2nd, 2008, and the second round between October 18th and November 22nd, 2008. Due to the holidays, the third set of interviews did not begin until March 3rd and was completed on April 6th, 2009.

The First Interview

In this study, I used a three-interview series as outlined by Seidman (1991) and Dolbeare and Schuman (Schuman, 1982). The process began with the first interview and a focus on each participant’s path to teaching, including their choice of their first career, the reasons and process by which they left that career, and their preparation for and induction into teaching. I conducted this interview in much the same way as Rubin and Rubin (2005) described as “opening the locks,” an interview focused on biographical background information and allowed me to simply get to know my subjects and establish a level of rapport with them. Basically, each of the participants told me his or her story from high school to present day.

The following questions served as a guide to my first interview with each participant:

1. Describe how you got into your original profession.
2. What did you find most enjoyable about it? What did you find most challenging?

3. When and how did you realize that you didn’t want to continue in that job?

4. When and how did teaching enter the picture?

5. How does teaching compare to your first profession?

6. Describe any specific experiences or skills from your first profession that you feel you use currently in the classroom.

7. What do you find most enjoyable about teaching? What do you find most challenging?

At the conclusion of the first interview, each participant was asked to keep a log of critical incidents for a minimum time period of six weeks in preparation for the second interview. These incidents could consist of interactions with students, colleagues, administrators, parents, or even the participants’ friends or family members, which caused the participants to confirm or doubt their decision to become teachers. The participants were asked to write a brief description of the event and present that description to me during the second interview so that the topic(s) could be discussed and elaborated upon further. I provided each participant with a steno pad notebook to place on his or her desk along with the instructions to simply log any happenings which cause him or her to reflect upon his or her choice of profession (Appendix D). I also provided the participants with examples of what type of incidents should be logged. One such example was if a teacher received a compliment or criticism from a colleague or administrator that caused him to reflect upon his decision to become a teacher. He or she
would then record the date, time, and comment, as well as whether the comment made him or her validate the decision to become a teacher or instead caused him or her to question that decision. Another example was a parent interaction of some sort, whether it was an email, phone call, or even a face-to-face meeting. The teacher would, once again, record the date, time, and any pertinent details of the interaction that the teacher needed to remember and to be able to discuss the episode later, along with his or her reaction to the event. This log would then serve as a stimulus of conversation in our second and/or third interview sessions. By exploring specific happenings and the participants’ reactions to them, I hoped to inspire a deeper and more revealing dialogue about their perceptions on their decision to leave their first career and to become a teacher.

Before the second interviews, I mailed every participant a hard copy of the transcript from the first interview. I included a brief hand-written note with the transcript that confirmed our date and time for the second interview, reminded him or her to bring his or her critical incident log, and asked him or her to read the included transcript and to feel free to make corrections and/or additions either in writing on the transcript or in person when we were to get together to talk.

The Second Interview

The second interview of the series was a bit different from the first, more like what Rubin and Rubin (2005) called “tree and branch” interviews, as I came to the interview after having begun an analysis of our first conversation. In this interview, I began with a brief review of the first interview, the categories of commonality which I had found and coded across the participants’ transcripts, and where each candidate fit into
each category. I asked each participant if he or she agreed with my classifications, and I allowed them to comment and/or make changes to the chart that I had created to summarize my data analysis. Additionally, for the second interview, I had more specific questions about my research topic (the tree trunk) divided into different categories (the branches). For example, I asked specific questions about each participant’s best moments in teaching, asking him or her to refer directly to his or her critical incident log and to further explain the events that he or she had recorded. I then repeated the process discussing each participant’s worst moments in teaching, and once again asked him or her to refer to the critical incident log. I asked each participant specifically if he or she believed that he or she made the right decision to teach and why he or she had that belief. These questions were directly related to the study’s overall research questions.

The following questions served as a guide to my second interview with each participant:

1. What comments do you have about the transcripts from our first interview? Please tell me of any corrections or clarifications you would like to see.
2. Open discussion of the chart with the summary of information from the first interview data analysis. What do you think about my categories? Where do you see yourself in each category and why?
3. Tell me about one of your best days in teaching, when you felt most that you are now in the right profession.
4. Tell me about one of your most challenging days, when you questioned or doubted your decision to be a teacher.
5. Tell me about some of the other incidents/events you wrote about in your critical incident log.

6. Do you think you made the right decision to become a teacher? Please explain why you do or do not.

7. In what ways was teaching what you expected it to be and in what ways was it not?

8. Where do you see yourself in five years? Fifteen years?

9. What will influence your exit from teaching?

After the second interview, I collected each participant’s critical incident log. I read them once again as I listened to and transcribed their second interviews. I did not use the specific contents of the logs as a data source. I did not write in the logs, code them, or alter them in anyway. I used them as a means to begin or to further develop in-depth conversations with the participants, and it was from the transcripts of these conversations that I found themes for this study. Some of the participants wrote in their logs daily, some only wrote a few times, but each used the log as I had requested, recording specific incidents from their daily lives, and it was a valuable source of information when they were describing both what they viewed as the positive and negative aspects of their new profession.

Before the third interview, I mailed every participant a hard copy of the transcript from the second interview. I included a brief hand-written note with the transcript that confirmed our date and time for the third interview, and I asked him or her to read the
included transcript and to feel free to make corrections and/or additions either in writing on the transcript or in person when we were to get together to talk.

**The Third Interview**

The third interview in the series allowed participants to reflect upon their previous two interviews and to explore the themes that emerged along the way. The data collected and analyzed from the first two interviews drove the topic and specific questions of the third. During the third interview, we focused mainly on reviewing the data I had collected and discussing the common themes across the participants. As mentioned, the first two interviews were guided by prepared questions, several of which I had written before data collection began, as they supported my research questions. For the second interview, I created some questions based on the data that I had collected in the first interview and my analysis of that data. The third interview for each participant, though, was rather unstructured and very individual to the participant. I used this interview as a means to member check my findings as well, and to get the participants’ opinions about what I was concluding in my study. In addition, I let all of the interviews with each participant be flexible in that I followed the lead of the participants as they talked, creating probing and follow-up questions as I needed to (Rubin & Rubin, 2005), while staying on topic and covering the same basic questions with each participant.

**Transcriptions of Interviews**

As previously mentioned, all first and second interviews were transcribed and a copy of the transcript was given to each participant for review (Guba & Lincoln, 1998) before the successive interview took place. Since the interviews were several weeks
apart, the transcripts were an important tool in reminding us about our previous conversations. The examination of the transcript also allowed for two types of member checking in this study, that of accuracy of the transcription and that of theme analysis.

After the first and second interviews, I transcribed each interview and sent a hard copy of the transcription to each respective participant. This process allowed us the opportunity to clarify, check for accuracy, and/or correct any aspect of the previous interview if needed. It also encouraged rapport and trust between me and the participants in the study. I chose not to transcribe the third interview because as I listened to the interviews, I found that there was not enough new data to warrant a transcription. The third interview was a conversation about the summary of the findings and my analysis of the common themes I found across the participants. I asked only clarifying questions about previous data and did not prepare new questions for the participants. During my data analysis, I did return to the recordings of the third interviews of several participants in order to confirm information, but overall I believed that transcribing the interviews was not necessary.

In addition to using the transcripts as an accuracy check, I presented my participants with my analysis of their interviews and my ideas of common themes within and across the collected data. This type of member checking added to the trustworthiness of my study as well, as it once again provided the participants the opportunity to express their opinions and reactions to the data as I analyzed it. I wanted the study to be open and transparent not only for the audience who reads the results, but also for the participants, so that they would have every opportunity to say all that they wished to share. By doing
this type of qualitative study, I was more able to come to understand the participants’ perceptions and journey to the field of education. By having thorough and extended conversations, where I was looking for depth and detail (Rubin & Rubin, 2005), I was able to shed light on their experiences as second career teachers. Table 2 depicts the

Table 2

_Data Collection Timeline_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Data Collection Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7/11/2008 – 9/12/2008</td>
<td>First interview with participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/22/2008 – 11/22/2008</td>
<td>Participants recorded critical incidents as they occurred. Each began with the date of their first interview or the first day of their school year and kept the log until the date of his or her second interview.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/18/2008 – 11/22/2008</td>
<td>Second interview with participants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

timeline of data collection that took place for this study. Table 3 depicts the dates and length of each interview conducted in the study.

_Data Analysis_

This qualitative study required recursive data collection and analysis. As Bogdan and Biklen (1992) described the practice of recursive data collection and analysis, I began to process the data much like a funnel, with a large opening at the beginning, and more directed and specific at the end, and I used parts of the study to find out what the important questions in the study actually were. I used the following methods in analyzing the data: (a) review of the interview transcripts, (b) discussions with a peer
Table 3

*Interview Schedule*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Date of first interview</th>
<th>Length of first interview</th>
<th>Date of second interview</th>
<th>Length of second interview</th>
<th>Date of third interview</th>
<th>Length of third interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>7/18/2008</td>
<td>65 minutes</td>
<td>11/22/2008</td>
<td>77 minutes</td>
<td>3/7/2009</td>
<td>64 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craig</td>
<td>7/21/2008</td>
<td>75 minutes</td>
<td>10/24/2008</td>
<td>70 minutes</td>
<td>3/6/2009</td>
<td>68 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeff</td>
<td>8/12/2008</td>
<td>70 minutes</td>
<td>11/08/2008</td>
<td>79 minutes</td>
<td>3/12/2009</td>
<td>65 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>7/29/2008</td>
<td>92 minutes</td>
<td>11/01/2008</td>
<td>93 minutes</td>
<td>3/14/2009</td>
<td>72 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>8/19/2008</td>
<td>61 minutes</td>
<td>11/09/2008</td>
<td>79 minutes</td>
<td>3/15/2009</td>
<td>63 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Todd</td>
<td>8/11/2008</td>
<td>78 minutes</td>
<td>10/18/2008</td>
<td>60 minutes</td>
<td>4/06/2009</td>
<td>70 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don</td>
<td>9/02/2008</td>
<td>70 minutes</td>
<td>10/28/2008</td>
<td>66 minutes</td>
<td>4/02/2009</td>
<td>64 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

debriefer, and (e) a research journal in which I recorded not only the logistics of the study but my thoughts and possible study insights as well.

**Review of the Interview Transcripts**

I began my analysis of the data after my first interviews with the participants and let what I found in that analysis help drive the direction of the study and the constant development of subsequent interview questions (Hatch, 2002; Wolcott, 1994). For example, in my analysis of the first interview transcripts, I found a theme that required further discussion with the participants, one that I was not anticipating. In the discussion about their journeys to becoming teachers, I discovered that five of the seven participants did not leave their first profession with the intent to become teachers. Instead, they left their jobs for a variety of different reasons and then later chose teaching as the next step.
in their career course. I was surprised by this realization, as I had gone into the study assuming that each participant had left their first career because they wanted to be teachers; never did I consider that teaching came about as a decision later in their lives. When preparing for my second interview with each participant, I included questions about that topic and explored their thinking about it as well. In the second and third interviews I also discussed with my participants any other commonalities and themes that I found among the participants. I talked to them about how I interpreted these commonalities, and I listened to how they interpreted them as well. Through these extended conversations, I formed questions that provided responses from the participants that were then later analyzed for the findings of the study.

In analyzing the transcripts, which I completed myself, I began by reading and rereading them in an effort to have a clear understanding of what the data indicated (Hatch, 2002; Wolcott, 1994). I then coded the transcripts according to similar themes or relationships, or what Erickson (1986) terms as “key linkages,” that occurred throughout the data (Hatch, 2002; Wolcott, 1994). From there I made a chart with each participant’s name and his or her response to each of the categories identified from the transcripts. This chart allowed me to clearly see where I had gaps in my data and what specific questions or areas I needed to further explore with each participant in the subsequent interview. For example, in the chart that I created from the data collected in the first interview, I found that there was commonality among the participants that each had a person or an incident that seemingly pushed him or her into making the final decision to become a teacher. This was not a specific question in my interview, yet for six of the
seven participants I found data to support this theme. In the second interview, I discussed this theme with the participants and asked if they agreed with what I had termed as their specific pushes into teaching. For the one candidate for whom I did not have data in this category, I then asked the question if he had what he perceived as a push into teaching, and he concluded that he did.

After identifying themes across the data collected from the participants’ interviews, I interpreted the data in order to explain the relationships that I found in the analysis, and then moved to the affirmation mode (Huberman & Miles, 1998) in order to confirm my findings with evidence from the transcripts of the interviews and to provide descriptive trustworthiness to my research (Maxwell, 1992). I returned once again to my participants for feedback at this point, so that we were able to co-construct the interpretations even further. Through this process, I was able to member check my findings, which is another large part of the trustworthiness and transparency of my study as a whole (Maxwell, 1996).

**Discussions With Peer Debriefer**

In addition to the member checking process with the participants, I engaged in peer debriefing sessions with a fellow doctoral candidate, who has since graduated. I have known her for several years. We have been in many doctoral classes together and had often worked as critical colleagues before this study. She is very familiar with my research interest, as she has seen it develop over the last few years, and she is especially knowledgeable about methodological issues and design, since she has recently completed the dissertation process herself. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), working with a
peer debriefer provides more credibility for a study. It allowed me (a) to explore and to question aspects of the study that I may not have thought to question otherwise, (b) to discuss and to experiment with the themes that I found in my analysis of the data before I presented those themes to my participants, (c) to improve upon the design of my study and to test any ideas for change, and finally, (d) to have an outlet for my emotions and reactions to the data and/or participants that may have in some way affected my decisions throughout the study. Through the use of written memos and either phone or face-to-face conversations (of which I also kept a written record), I counted on my peer debriefer to take the role seriously, to offer insight when possible, and to continually question and challenge my decisions in an effort to add transparency and trustworthiness to my research. Throughout the study, she was an integral part of the data analysis process. She often scribed while we spoke about the study, so that I could see my thought process and organization on paper. She pushed me to expand on my ideas, and she often challenged my assumptions. She read and reread my work, and through our conversations I was able to develop a solid outline for the findings of this study. Overall, our work together gave me confidence in my research, its design, and the credibility of its findings.

Research Journal

Throughout the study, I kept a research journal in which I recorded the details of the study itself, such as when and with whom I had each interview, where the interviews took place, the time of each interview, and any other applicable details that arose, such as complications or alternations to my schedule or the interview format. For example, during one interview, which took place on the outside patio of a coffee shop, we were
interrupted briefly by a funeral procession for a local police officer. During the procession, I stopped the recorder as we joined the crowd at the side of the road, and afterward we resumed our conversation and the recording. I noted in my log the reason for the break in the recording and an explanation for the moments of off-topic conversation.

I also incorporated memos in the research journal about my thoughts and insights about the data collected as I was going through the data collection and analysis process. I used these memos to write briefly about the commonalities and differences that I saw in the data and to record questions that I wanted to ask the participants in our subsequent interviews. I also wrote ideas that I wanted to further explore in the literature or maybe in a future research project. The journal served overall as a means for me to record and organize my thoughts throughout the entire research process.

As suggested by Seidman (1991), “‘Enough’ is an interactive reflection of every step of the interview process and [is] different for each study and each researcher” (p. 45). For this study, then, “enough” was when I felt that I had a complete understanding of my participants’ perceptions of their choice of becoming a teacher and when I understood their journey to the classroom and their views on that journey and their future in the field of education. After the three interviews with each teacher and the subsequent analysis of that data, I did have that understanding. And while I found myself with many additional questions and avenues that I had recorded in my research journal and wished to explore, ones that branched off, some rather dramatically, from the original research
questions of this study, I believed that they were questions that needed to be researched at a different time and in a different investigation.

**Trustworthiness and Quality of the Study**

This study relied on interviewing as the main source of data. I worked with teachers whom I did not know previously, in an effort to increase the trustworthiness of my study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The dependence on interviewing, however, could have produced three important limitations on my study. First and most importantly, I had to trust that my participants were open and forthcoming. I believe that I did build a trusting relationship with them in such a way that they were very sincere with their responses and their stories. By protecting their identities, meeting with them three times over a period of 10 months, sharing the transcripts of their interviews with them, and asking their opinions on my findings, I was able to gain their trust which, I believe, encouraged them to participate fully and candidly.

A second possible limitation of this study was the size of the sample. In order to have in-depth and detailed conversations, I had to restrict my study to a small number of participants, starting with eight and ending with seven. Such a small sample is common in a qualitative study, however, and while I realize that my findings are not likely to be generalizable to other settings, I believe that they are a valuable contribution to educational research, and that they will inspire other qualitative researchers to investigate the same or similar questions in different educational environments.

A third possible limitation caused by the reliance on interviewing in this study was the difficulty in triangulating my data. This limitation was overcome in two ways.
First, I had multiple participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and used the data collected from each to find commonalities and themes across participants. Finding themes across several participants, rather than relying on the story of just one, added trustworthiness to my findings. Secondly, I introduced the critical incident log as a means for the participants to record their thoughts and any pertinent happenings during the time span between our first and second interviews. This log, while I did not analyze its contents specifically, gave the participants the opportunity to discuss with me events that they may have either forgotten about or not even noted as important due to when or how quickly they occurred in their daily lives. Having the log on their desk in their classroom everyday reminded the participants to take more notice of the day-by-day events that either confirmed or caused them to doubt their decision to teach. The log provided a springboard of discussion for our second and third interviews and supplied concrete examples of events that happened in the participants’ lives rather than mere memories that they would have tried to recall on the spot during the interview process. In addition, rather than just stating their opinions about my questions or providing vague answers, they were able to offer specific descriptive incidents that occurred in their teaching or everyday lives and that supported their views.

While the critical incident log added trustworthiness to the study as a source of concrete examples for discussions with the participants, it also produced an additional possible limitation, that of timing. Since the participants only collected incidents for a period of six to eight weeks, much of the school year was absent. In addition, the events were collected towards the beginning of the school year, and they may have differed
greatly from those that would have been collected during a different time period, such as the very end of the year, or during the holiday seasons.

In spite of the possible limitations mentioned in this section, I believe that this study was conducted ethically and thoroughly, and that it will contribute to educational research. I did all that I could to conduct a transparent and trustworthy study both for my participants and for my readers, and I believe that the design of the study was appropriate for the type of data that I was collecting. I hope to inspire other researchers to investigate the same topic in an effort for us to come to a better understanding of how to educate and to prepare future teachers, especially those who decide to become educators later in life and after working in other careers.

The next chapter, Chapter 4, presents the findings of this study as a result of the systematic data collection and analysis described in this chapter. It begins with a short biography of each participant, and then focuses on the common themes identified from the data provided by the participants. These themes provide the answers to the study’s original research question and sub-questions.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This chapter includes a detailed accounting of the findings of the study as a result of systematic data collection and analysis. First, I have included a brief review of the study. Secondly, I have provided a short biography of each participant in order to illustrate his or her journey to becoming a teacher as well as to briefly describe each person’s current teaching context and future plans. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of the participants. Next, I discuss common themes identified from the data provided by the participants. These themes provide the answers to the study’s original research question and its sub-questions. The study focused on developing answers to these questions:

What perceptions do second career teachers have of their choice of profession?

1. What factors influence these perceptions?

2. Do they perceive that they made the “right” decision?

3. What factors influence their decision to remain in or leave the teaching profession?

4. What are the differences between the perceptions of secondary level and primary level teachers?

Review of the Study

Through the use of interview studies, the perceptions of seven second career teachers were studied over a period of 10 months. For this study, a second career teacher
is defined as an individual who earned a college or university degree in an area other than education, and who subsequently worked in a career other than education for a minimum of five years. In addition to being a second career teacher, each participant in this study has been teaching for at least five years.

The participants in the study were each interviewed a total of three times, with each interview lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. Interviews took place between July 2008 and April 2009. All interviews were digitally recorded, and all first and second interviews were transcribed and reviewed by each respective participant. The third interview for each participant was a summary of the previous interviews as well as a discussion of the commonalities and differences identified during data analysis. Since there were no new questions presented during this last interview, I decided that transcribing the interview was not necessary.

Analysis of the data was on-going throughout the 10-month interview process. Common themes and emerging patterns identified in the transcripts of the interviews were discussed and further investigated with each participant and were instrumental in creating specific questions for the second and third interview sessions. Furthermore, the third interview session in particular was used as a means to member check proposed findings of the study, as I presented each participant with what I found as commonalities and differences and asked his or her opinion on the themes that I had interpreted from the data.

In addition to the three interviews, each participant kept a log of critical incidents for a minimum time period of six weeks. A critical incident was defined as either a
positive or negative interaction with students, colleagues, administrators, parents, or even friends, family members, or people on the street, which caused the participant to confirm or to doubt his or her decision to become a teacher. This log was then used as a source of discussion during the second interview, as the participants were asked to expand upon or clarify each of the incidents they described in their logs. This process provided specific examples of the participants’ best and worst experiences with teaching, and it revealed many of the influences that affect the participants’ perceptions of their second career choice and their decision to either remain in or leave the profession. I collected each participant’s log after the second interview so that I could review it once again if needed during data analysis. The logs were read and discussed, but not coded for commonalities or differences. I did not alter or write in the logs at any point. For a few of the participants, it was necessary to revisit this log once again in the third interview, as a means to further explain or clarify an event that had been recorded or discussed in the second interview. With the exception of one participant, whose first interview did not take place until the first week of September, all of the participants began their logs during the first week of school, which was the final week of August 2008. Although the participants were asked to keep the log only until October 10th, which would have been a 6-week time period, each teacher went beyond that date and recorded events up to the date of their second interview, which for some of the participants was not until the beginning of November.
Biographies of the Participants

Elementary Teachers

Linda. When Linda graduated from The Ohio State University with a degree in fashion merchandising and a minor in marketing, she quickly landed a job as the special events coordinator for a major Ohio department store. Her responsibilities included planning all of the store’s fashion shows, contests, and retail events throughout the state. She described the job as “fun and very prestigious” (Interview 1, July 18, 2008), as she was in charge of many large-scale activities and was able to meet and work with some rather famous people. Although she enjoyed her job for the first few years, the long hours, which included both day planning hours and evening show hours, slowly began to take a toll on her. When she left the special events coordinator position and took employment in retail stores, she was pleased to be able to work a more regular daily schedule. On the other hand, though, she found a lack of flexibility with regard to her overall calendar. This caused her to eventually leave the fashion industry altogether.

For a brief period of time, as she was preparing for her wedding, Linda took a job as a manager in a doctor’s office. “It was like a rebellion from retail,” she said. “It didn’t pay great, but [my boss] appreciated me” (Interview 1, July 18, 2008). With the arrival of her first child, she left this position and decided to stay home full-time. During the years that Linda cared for her two young children, she was able to stay active in the workforce by doing some freelance graphic design and independent marketing work from her home. That ended abruptly, though, when her family moved to another state in order to further her husband’s career. After a few years away from family and friends, Linda
and her family were happily able to move back to Ohio. Her children were in school all
day by then, and Linda found herself with a lot more time on her hands. She began
looking for something to do outside of her home and decided on substitute teaching,
“really just to get out [of the house] and get some adult interaction” (Interview 1, July 18,
2008).

Years earlier, when making her first career decision, Linda had thought briefly
about going into education, but had quickly abandoned the idea because it was a five-year
program. “[Fashion merchandising] was easy. I was in my lower 20s, and I just wanted
to get through college” (Interview 1, July 18, 2008). Soon after she began working in
classrooms, though, Linda found herself remembering those days of wanting to become a
teacher. During the spring semester of that same school year, she was surprisingly
offered a long-term, first grade subbing position, even without a full teaching license or a
degree in education. She quickly accepted the job offer, and then, at the end of her term
that school year, both her principal and assistant principal, pleased by her work, pulled
her aside to let her know how much they felt that she should pursue teaching formally.
After some self-reflection and discussion with her husband, Linda took their advice, and
enrolled in the John Carroll University school-based master’s program.

Now a sixth-year teacher, and still enjoying her first graders, Linda sees herself in
education for many years to come. She is a very passionate person who cares deeply
about her students and wants desperately to be a good teacher and to make an impact on
their lives. She talks with pride about herself as an educator, and she feels that she is
effective in her classroom. She also sees herself as a quiet leader among her colleagues,
and she describes this role in two ways: one, as a skilled reading teacher who often shares her expertise with both new and veteran coworkers, and two, by the fact that people, including her principal, listen when she talks, especially at staff meetings. Although she does have an interest in pursuing a reading specialist position someday or even switching to a part-time position of some sort, she does not see herself leaving the elementary school building, or education in general, anytime before retirement.

**Craig.** Craig also thought briefly about being a teacher when he was deciding on which undergraduate degree to pursue. Being the first from his family to go to college, however, he chose to take the business route instead, as he dreamt of a secure job that provided both professional status and a high salary.

There was a pull between trying to find something that I was interested in, and this idea . . . of doing something that I could become successful and rich at. You know, that goofiness . . . I had thought of [teaching], but to be honest with you, the only thought I had was, “Well, that’s about the dumbest thing I could do, become a teacher. Teachers don’t make any money.” (Interview 1, July 21, 2008)

So for Craig, teaching never arose as a serious option when he was in college. He floated between majors for several semesters and even transferred colleges at one point, finally settling down as a marketing major at the University of Dayton and later earning his MBA degree.

For many years Craig worked for a fuel and power company in its marketing department. At one point during his tenure there, Craig “caught the teaching bug”
while working in the company’s corporate development department.

I was teaching training courses, and I loved it. I loved being kind of on stage. There was this energy, this adrenaline. I loved doing that, and I think I did it pretty well. I mean, I was successful at it. (Interview 1, July 21, 2008)

Shortly thereafter, however, the company disbanded that department and Craig moved on to sales, eventually leaving the company altogether upon moving to a new city. There he joined another large corporation, again working in fuels, and later he took a job with a third company that eventually offered him a severance deal during a difficult time for the business. Craig took what he called a “very generous buy-out package [and a] once in a lifetime opportunity to follow a passion” (Interview 1, July 21, 2008). It was then that he returned to his original plans and decided to pursue a profession in education, planning at first to teach at the secondary level. Through his master’s program, its fieldwork, and some self-reflection, however, Craig found his niche in the elementary school instead. “The little kids, they just drew me in immediately, [and] I have no regrets. I wouldn’t change it for anything” (Interview 1, July 21, 2008).

Craig is very enthusiastic about his work with students, with a special focus on the moral character development of the kids. He believes that his job as a teacher is to help the children mature into good people, willing to be helpful and respectful of others, and to help them prepare to be hardworking, contributing members of society. He takes his job very seriously, and while he understands and fulfills his responsibilities with
respect to state testing and national mandates, he feels that the whole child development is ultimately where his goals lie when working with his third graders year after year.

Although he does not plan to leave the field of education altogether, Craig does not see himself teaching third grade for the long haul. He and his wife, a teacher turned school counselor, have a young daughter, now two years old, who was born with Downs Syndrome. In the near future, Craig is hoping to get involved in advocacy for children with special needs and to help educate others, whether parents, children, teachers, administrators, board members, or congressmen, about how to better serve and work with students with extra needs. By doing so, he hopes to help special needs students become welcomed and accepted in any typical classroom environment, by both the teacher and their peers.

Jeff. Teaching was never an option for Jeff. Upon high school graduation he left southern Florida and came to Ohio to pursue a college degree in chemistry. Shortly after arriving, he quickly changed his major to history and eventually added minors in sociology and English, figuring that he could “do anything” (Interview 1, August 12, 2008) with these degrees. Upon graduation, he stayed on campus and worked in the admissions office and said that he really enjoyed working with college students. At the coaxing of some friends and with a lead on a job opportunity, Jeff moved to Chicago. After the job situation did not pan out, Jeff worked a series of retail jobs, including one in a record store where he designed the advertising displays. Then, through the connection of several friends and some unrelenting work on Jeff’s part, he got his first advertising job at a small agency in Chicago. From there, Jeff worked his way into a larger company
in Ohio, finding success in a career for which he had no formal education. “I saw it as a challenge,” he said, “and I like challenges” (Interview 1, August 12, 2008). Throughout his time with the company, however, what Jeff enjoyed the most was working with the college interns who would come in for short stints of time. “Nobody spent time with them. They’d just give them [meaningless] jobs like filing, and that’s not what they wanted. They wanted to learn the business” (Interview 1, August 12, 2008). So as Jeff told it, he would let the interns ask him questions, and he would give them advice on how to not only survive, but how to succeed in advertising.

With the birth of his first daughter, and having grown weary of what he labeled his “whiny clients” (Interview 1, August 12, 2008), Jeff voluntarily left the ad company, and for six months, he stayed home and happily took care of his new baby girl. With a “strong desire to make a difference in the world” (Interview 1, August 12, 2008), he then decided to look into the master’s of teaching program at Kent State University. He began taking class fulltime, always with the intent of working with elementary students.

We would be at our friends’ house, my wife and I, and I would be the one hanging out with the kids, playing. And I thought back and remembered that I used to do the same thing with my cousins. I didn’t want to work with college kids . . . even though I enjoyed helping the interns. . . . I didn’t want to work with high school kids. I had always enjoyed being around the young kids. I’m a big kid at heart. (Interview 1, August 12, 2008).

Now a Nationally Board Certified Teacher, Jeff sees himself in the classroom for many years to come. He is a very passionate, upbeat, self-confident man, and he talks
with humor and zest about himself, his family, and his teaching. He is very proud of his work and his accomplishments, and he feels that he is successful in his classroom and in his work with his students. Professionally, Jeff does not currently have any plans to go back to the university or to pursue any new degree or licensure. For now, he is satisfied and challenged right where he is.

**Secondary Teachers**

**Jennifer.** When deciding on her undergraduate pursuits, Jennifer considered teaching rather sincerely because she had developed a great love of literature and writing throughout her high school experience and thought that teaching would enable her to follow those passions and share them with others. Upon further contemplation, however, she changed her mind and decided to pursue her secondary interest, psychology, instead. She entered college with the dream of becoming a forensic psychologist, hoping that she could make much more money in that profession. “I thought to myself, ‘[Teaching] would kind of be my ideal job, but I don’t want to be poor, so I’m not going to go into teaching’” (Interview 1, July 29, 2008). After a few years at the university, however, Jennifer said that she became rather disillusioned with psychology as a major. She attributed this to the large class sizes and the high number of unmotivated students in her program. When asked by a friend what she would rather be doing instead of psychology, Jennifer immediately answered that she would be studying English. With that said, she changed her major to English (and kept psychology as a minor), with the intent to go into publishing or some kind of advertising.
All plans changed, however, when Jennifer gave birth to her daughter. “I wasn’t really available anymore to head off to New York City and work on Madison Avenue” (Interview 1, July 29, 2008). So she maintained her English major and then, in her senior year, after doing some individual tutoring and teaching an orientation class for the university, Jennifer decided to formally pursue teaching as her profession. She went to the education department and asked how to go about changing her major. According to Jennifer, though, “They were pretty uncooperative and unwilling to make substitutions for any of the classes I had already taken” (Interview 1, July 29, 2008). She found herself upset and frustrated. Facing another two years of school, she once again shifted gears. She completed her undergraduate degree in English that same year and then left that university to enroll in the Masters of Arts program at The University of Akron. She went to work on earning a master’s degree in English. During that time she also served as a graduate assistant, which included a teaching assignment with college freshmen. This was when she confirmed her desire to teach. “I just really felt at home. And I thought, ‘This is what I’m supposed to do’” (Interview 1, July 29, 2008). But upon further investigation into the salaries of those teaching at the college level with only a master’s degree, Jennifer found herself back with the same quandary she had upon entering college as an undergraduate: She wanted to pursue a career that was not able to meet her financial aspirations.

Jennifer stayed with the program though, and eventually graduated with a master’s degree in English. Finding work proved difficult however. “I looked in the paper, and guess what? There was no big sign that said, ‘English major wanted’”
Jennifer found that she was over qualified for a large number of jobs. Eventually she got hired as a reporter for a local newspaper. She had to settle for the low salary of this position, but she did have insurance and a flexible schedule, which, with a six year old daughter, were both extremely important to her. A few years down the road, Jennifer left the paper and she took a different journalism job, working as the managing editor for a trade magazine. This position offered a lot more money, a nice office, and a regular schedule, but Jennifer found herself unchallenged and eventually bored. She remembered a defining moment in her career,

I was at the company of the trade magazine, and we were on a deadline . . . and I was rushing copies of our pages into our editor and then rushing them out. And down the hallway, we had this really long hallway; I see another managing editor from a different magazine doing the same thing. And I just thought, “That’s all we do. We move papers from one area to another and then back again. And if this magazine closed tomorrow, would it matter?” And I thought, “Not really. It really wouldn’t. I mean, obviously it would matter to us who were employed there, but would it matter to the world? No.” (Interview 1, July 29, 2008)

So with the encouragement of her husband, Jennifer quit her job and enrolled in the master’s of teaching program at Kent State University.

Today, Jennifer believes that she has finally found herself in the right profession, and she is openly passionate about her job and about making a difference in the lives of her students. She currently teaches senior English at a public Ohio high school, and although she would not be opposed to leaving her current district, Jennifer sees herself in
the classroom for many years. She does have an interest in pursuing a license in gifted education, but currently does not have any set plans to go back to school.

**Cindy.** Cindy thought about being an English teacher throughout high school and even during the college application process, but later found herself avoiding the education major due to lack of confidence in her ability to be effective in the classroom. “I had low self-esteem, and I didn’t think I would be good at it” (Interview 1, August 19, 2008). Becoming absorbed in the trial of OJ Simpson and reading the book that evolved from his legal proceedings inspired Cindy to turn her deep interest in reading and writing towards the law, and she decided to obtain certification as a paralegal. During her program at Kent State University, she earned an internship at an Akron law firm which later turned into a full time position after graduation. She eventually left that firm to work at a smaller practice which offered more money, better opportunities, and the chance to learn a great deal about our legal system, the law itself, and how to work with people.

After getting married, Cindy’s goals started to shift, and her focus became her personal future and her desire to have children. She began to wonder, then, how she would be able to obtain these dreams if she continued working at such a demanding pace.

I loved [my job]. I did. But it was exhausting with not a lot of time off. I worked a lot of hours, [and] I had seen woman after woman leave the firm for good because they started having kids. (Interview 1, August 19, 2008)

So Cindy decided to make a “back-up plan” (Interview 1, August 19, 2008) for herself, and she went back to school to get her master’s degree in English literature, taking
classes in the evening, while still working at the law firm. After completing a few classes, Cindy discovered the Masters of Arts in Teaching program at Kent State University and decided that it was the direction in which she wanted to head. In 2001, then, she stopped taking classes for her master’s degree in English, quit her job as a paralegal, and switched over full time to the college of education with the intent to become a high school English teacher. She landed a job right after graduation and has worked at that public Ohio high school ever since.

At present, Cindy finds herself very stressed and often frustrated with her job and the teaching profession as a whole. She has had an extremely difficult schedule this past year, which included daily travel off school grounds, as well as several new class preparations. She feels overworked and often underappreciated by both her administration and society in general. “You get beat down everyday” (Interview 1, August 19, 2008), she explained. Overall, she said that teaching has not been what she expected, but that she is learning new ways to cope every year, and she works well with and depends on the many friends that she has met in her department and in her building. She loves her time in the classroom, and thoroughly enjoys working with her students. “As soon as the door shuts and the class starts, that’s when I feel my best” (Interview 1, August 19, 2008), she said. This love for her students, as well as some of the extra benefits of teaching, such as the schedule and the health insurance, will keep Cindy in the classroom for many years to come. While she is currently pursuing National Board Certification as a means to better herself and her teaching, Cindy has no plans to go back to school or pursue certification in other areas or in administration. She is very happy in
the classroom, and even though she feels pressure from outside forces, she intends to teach for many more years.

**Todd.** Todd said that teaching was never an option when he was deciding on careers and where to go to college. As a teenager, he was highly involved in his church’s youth group, and quite early in his high school career he decided to pursue a career in the church.

I remember being on a trip, a long trip, to Washington, D.C. and leaning up against the van and thinking. And it just kind of struck me, “Wow, it’d be kind of interesting to work in a church all my life.” So I kept pursuing that and it seemed like that’s what I wanted to do. (Interview 1, August 11, 2008)

Having only applied to one college, Mount Vernon Nazarene College in central Ohio, Todd earned a bachelor’s degree in Christian education with minors in both psychology and communications. After graduation, he took a job as an associate pastor and youth director at a church with his childhood pastor. Although he never planned to become a pastor himself, he continued his education by going on to the seminary and earning his master’s degree.

Despite the fact that Todd loved working with the teens and doing his service in his parish, over the seven years that he worked as a youth pastor, he became more and more frustrated with what he described as “resistance” (Interview 1, August 11, 2008) from families in the congregation, especially as he tried to get them to become more involved and to take on increased responsibility for the religious education of the parish’s youth, their own children. “One of the biggest difficulties was that in many ways I was
being paid to do what really the church itself and the families should be doing” (Interview 1, August 11, 2008). This difference in philosophy is what eventually led Todd to leave his position in the church. After two years of working odd jobs and of soul searching, he rediscovered his love of literature and theater, and as a result, he decided to enroll in the Masters of Arts in Teaching program at Kent State University with the hope of becoming a high school English teacher.

After a rough start to his teaching career, Todd is currently feeling much more settled and confident in his position as a classroom teacher in his large suburban school in southern Ohio. While at times he is frustrated with district, state, and national administration, policies and mandates, he has tried to focus wholeheartedly on his students and to provide them with sound and worthwhile lessons. Recently, he has started doing the school’s daily announcements as well as work at several of the after-school athletic events, all of which have helped him to feel like he is now part of the school community as a whole, not just one of more than 200 teachers in the school’s classrooms. “I just feel like I’ve become niched in the school” (Interview 1, August 11, 2008). Todd definitely sees himself in teaching for many years, and he does not have plans to pursue other degrees or any type of certification in administration. He is satisfied in the classroom. He wakes up each day ready to engage his students in valuable discussions about life and literature.

Don. Don said that while he had always known that he wanted to coach, he never considered teaching as a career option when he was making his undergraduate decisions. In fact, he did not have any serious career plans at all while he was in high school and
even as he chose his university. He selected a large college just for that reason, then, leaving his career options very open. By the time he left home to go to college, he had decided that he wanted to study some kind of medicine, but since he did not know which specific area, he enrolled as a simple chemistry major his freshman year. Later he added a psychology minor, hoping that it would be helpful when dealing with future patients.

During Don’s freshman year in college, a simple yet career-defining event occurred; he found himself needing contact lenses. At about the same time, one of his close friends chose to specialize in optometry. “Going through it myself and having my buddy, who is still one of my best friends, making his decision, those things kind of slid me into the pre-optometry stuff too” (Interview 1, September 2, 2008). Upon earning his medical degree, Don worked for a local optometrist for a few years, but then quickly teamed up with another friend and purchased a practice from a retiring optometrist in the area. Together they built a successful partnership; they grew the business with not only their optometry patients, but also with vision therapy, a highly specialized area that began to set them apart from their counterparts.

It was this area of vision therapy that led Don to find his passion for education. About two years into their partnership, having built a good reputation for themselves as doctors, Don and his partner were invited to The Ohio State University to teach a seminar on their use of vision therapy, and as Don said, “That’s where the teaching bug got caught” (Interview 1, September 2, 2008). They continued to work together both at their home optometry practice and on the road teaching classes for several years. After a while, though, certain aspects of Don’s profession began to wear on him.
One, the hours were getting kind of nuts [with] afternoons, evenings, being on call. [My wife and I] started having kids. We built a house, and [life] was good. But the insurance stuff was starting to get crazy, and there was a legal thing; somebody sued me for something that I really didn’t do. And I just really got turned off, and it just got to a point where I got up in the morning, and I didn’t want to go to work. (Interview 1, September 2, 2008)

Talking with his wife and business partner, Don decided to give it another year before he made any drastic decisions about leaving the practice. When he didn’t feel any better 12 months later, he decided to sell his half of the business to his partner and to take some time off to decide what he wanted to do for the next part of his life. On the list were vision research and real estate, but in the end, after about a year’s time, Don decided to go back to school and earn a master’s degree in teaching.

The teaching thing appealed to me for a couple of reasons. One, I would get to spend time with my kids. Also, I could coach, and even more, it wasn’t going to be a lot of extra classes because of the degree I had in chemistry. (Interview 1, September 2, 2008)

So with the support of his wife, Don enrolled in a yearlong education program and a short time later he was in the classroom, teaching full time.

After 13 years in education, Don said that he still truly enjoys his time in the classroom. He plans to stay there for many years, especially as his own children pass through the public high school where he teaches. Although he does have some interest at eventually teaching at the college level, he does not have any aspiration to work as an
administrator in his building or any other. From the beginning of his teaching career, Don has become more and more disenchanted with those managing education, from the district through the national level. He describes the problem as “image versus substance” (Interview 1, September 2, 2008), and he struggles to come to terms with what he perceives as a massive disconnect between what education claims to be and the actual reality that he sees every day in his own school. Although he is extremely frustrated and often angry with the part of education that seems beyond his control, he is very content in his daily job of working with his own students. It is in his own classroom where he feels most joyful, and it is this excitement that will keep Don coming to school for many years in the future.

Review of the Participants

The participants in this study perceived themselves as successful in their first profession. For a variety of reasons, however, they left that profession, and whereas their paths were very different, each participant eventually decided to become a classroom teacher. Table 4 provides a brief overview of the seven participants, their first career choices, as well as the number of years they were in that career, the number of years they have been in the classroom, and the grade level they are currently teaching.

Analysis of Common Themes

Several common themes resulted in the analysis of the interview transcripts of each participant. This section of the chapter presents the information across the participants in order to understand the major themes that answer the study’s research question and sub questions:
Table 4

Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>First career</th>
<th>Number of years in first career</th>
<th>Number of years teaching</th>
<th>Current grade level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>Fashion merchandising; Special events coordinator; Retail manager</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craig</td>
<td>Marketing/MBA</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeff</td>
<td>Advertising/Marketing</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>English 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>Paralegal</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>English 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Todd</td>
<td>Youth pastor</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>English 10 and 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don</td>
<td>Optometrist</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Chemistry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The analysis of the data provided by the participants in this study resulted in the emergence of the following four themes:

1. All seven participants in the study perceive themselves as successful teachers. They base this perception on the success of their students which they are aware of by either the feedback from students and/or parents, official recognition by a state agency, or by personal observation of students in their classrooms.
2. All seven participants in the study perceive that they made the right decision to become teachers. They base this perception on the belief that they are successful teachers and that their expectations with regard to personal and professional fulfillment have been met.

3. All seven participants in the study plan to stay in education, six in their present classrooms. The perception of personal and professional fulfillment, along with the perceived self benefits of the teaching profession, will keep them in the profession until retirement.

4. Both commonalities and differences exist between the perceptions of secondary level and elementary level second career teachers. The most notable differences include the following: (a) secondary level teachers perceived themselves in conflict with their administration, whereas elementary level teachers did not; (b) secondary level teachers perceived the lack of student motivation as a challenge to their success as teachers; and (c) elementary level teachers focused on the challenges of special education as a perceived obstacle to their achievement as teachers.

What follows is a detailed description of the data that supports the aforementioned themes that resulted from this study.

**Perceptions of Choice of Profession**

The first major theme that resulted in this study is that all seven of the participants perceive themselves as successful in teaching. During the second interview, the participants talked in detail about their best and worst experiences in their new
profession, often referring to specific events that they had recorded in their critical incident logs. Even though the participants were able to describe both positive and challenging aspects to their new profession, all seven of them perceive themselves as successful and valuable to their schools and their students. Through analysis of the interview transcripts, two commonalities emerged across the participants with regard to the factors that influence the participants’ perception that they are successful teachers. The first commonality is in regard to the participants’ best experiences; each participant related his or her success in the classroom with that of student accomplishment. A second commonality resulted in relation to the participants’ negative experiences in teaching; each participant described his or her worst moments in terms of interactions with other school employees, most notably administrators. What follows is a detailed description of those two commonalities.

“Best” experiences: Student success reaffirmed their decision to change careers. All seven of the participants in this study described their greatest days of teaching, days in which their decision to become teachers was unquestionably confirmed, in terms of student success. The participants became aware of student success through one or more of the following means: (a) direct communication with students and parents, (b) official recognition by a state agency, and (c) observation of student success. In addition, several of the teachers in this study stated that finding success with what they perceived as the more difficult students in their classrooms allowed them to feel particularly successful as teachers.
Direct communication with students and parents. Four of the individuals in this study, Craig, Jeff, Cindy, and Don, became aware of student success through communication with former students or parents of former students who took the time to tell the teacher that he or she had an important impact on the students’ lives, either academically and/or personally. This communication came in various forms, such as thank-you cards, emails, and face-to-face conversations. Most of the communication, such as the cards and emails, were deliberately planned by the student or parent. Others, such as the oral conversations, were in the form of spontaneous and unintended encounters between the teacher and the student or parent.

In his critical incident log, Craig wrote about a happenstance encounter with parents of a student during the school’s annual ice cream social at the beginning of the school year. In the second interview he elaborated on what had happened:

One of the families, I had two of their daughters, and the third is in second grade.

So I was sitting there talking with them at the ice cream social. And what’s interesting is that I don’t even have one of their kids this year. I had them three years ago and last year. They are an awesome family. So we’re talking like that, and I was talking to the dad, and . . . I said, “I so appreciate your kids and you and your wife. I really hope I get [your other daughter] next year, because it’s just nice knowing that you guys are going to be there.” And he just made a really nice comment. He said, “You are our favorite teacher in this building.” (Interview 2, October 24, 2008)
Later in his second interview, Craig described another positive interaction that he had with a parent:

[The mom] had asked, “If we were to invite you over for dinner.” Because I share a lot of personal things about my life; like the kids know my favorite meal is lasagna, . . . And so the mom said, “[My daughter] wanted me to ask this question for the family. Would it be okay if we have you and your family over? [She] wants to have you all over for lasagna. Would that be appropriate?” I said, “It would definitely be appropriate. We would be honored if you wanted to do that, and you invited us into your home. I don’t think there is any greater compliment than to be invited to your home and have your meal.” (Interview 2, October 24, 2008)

Jeff described an email that he received from a former student and how it helped to start his school year off on a positive note:

The first day of school this year, I sat down at my desk and turned on my computer, and there was an email from a former student, [who] is now a junior at Bowling Green, and she said, “I don’t know if you remember me, but I am just finishing up. I’m going to be doing my student teaching, and I decided to get into this because I really enjoyed the way you taught my class.” And I was like, “Oh my gosh, this is so cool.” The timing was unbelievable. . . . I answered it right away, “Yes, I remember you. You were in my sixth period class. You sat in the third row.” . . . and I told her, “Hey, if you are looking for a school to come into to
do student teaching, I’d love to have you.” It would be great. (Interview 2, November 8, 2008)

Cindy was surprised by a former student who came to visit her in her classroom one afternoon:

I had a student come in on the fifteenth. He brought me Starbucks because he remembered how much I like it. He goes to Malone [College], and he said, “I just really missed your class, and I just wanted to feel happy.” And so he came in and sat in on my class for that period, and that was so nice. (Interview 2, November 9, 2008)

Cindy also talked about her critical incident log and other positive entries that she had made:

I also wrote in [the log] how I got some cards in the mail at school from students thanking me for getting them ready for college. So that’s been very good. . . . And a few other students stopped by to visit . . . and that was wonderful. (Interview 2, November 9, 2008)

Don shared a note of thanks that he received from a student and talked about how enjoyable it was to be appreciated:

I get thanked a fair amount here . . . [from] parents, some, [but] I would say less than the kids because the kids are with me everyday. But I’ve been lucky in the fact that that’s not an uncommon note that I get. And there are days where you need to see one of them. (Interview 2, October 27, 2008)
**Official recognition by a state agency.** For Linda, the recognition of student success came more officially, from the state level, as she described how she felt when her district received an “Excellent” rating on its report card.

I have to say one of the best days . . . was the first day of school, where we found out that our school was rated “Excellent,” finally. We had done a lot of changes . . . investigating to find out why every student wasn’t getting to where they needed to be . . . We took some of these kids [and] focused directly just on their strengths and their weaknesses. And finally we were rated “Excellent,” and everybody made a big deal about it and that was a moment when you say, “Finally, all of my hard work is paying off.” And not just in my own personal way . . . [but] it shows that we are working as a team, and all of the students got there. It wasn’t just my class; it was all of us and all of our classes. So I would say that that was one of the most positive moments I’ve had. (Interview 2, November 22, 2008)

**Observation of student success.** Although Craig, Jeff, Cindy, and Don became aware of student success through direct communication with former students and/or parents, and although Linda found it through state ranking, the other two participants in the study, Jennifer and Todd, focused on student interactions and successes visible in their day-to-day classroom activities. Jennifer described a day in her Advanced Placement classroom:

In my AP class we had this amazing discussion, where they really got it, and it was on this higher level of thinking, and we’re laughing, but at the same time
we’re really talking about these really deep issues . . . So when the kids have that “ah hah” moment and the light goes on, and they just say something, and they don’t even realize how profound it is, but maybe there’s a moment where either I do or the rest of the class does. And you know, that is what I live for. That’s when my arm hairs stand on edge and I think, “Yes. This is what it’s all about.”

(Interview 2, November 1, 2008)

Todd also described a day from one of his literature classes as one of his best experiences in teaching:

I remember one lesson we did for [To Kill a Mockingbird] where we were talking about social class structures . . . So to do that, we opened up [the discussion] and I said, “What are the social classes in the high school?” We listed them all on the board, and they were throwing out all kinds of stuff. In that process we came up with this great list, and then I asked them, “Okay, now where would you fit?” And it was just fascinating to hear them say, “Well, I don’t fit into any of those categories.” I wasn’t expecting that. I was expecting, “Oh, I fit into this one or that one.” . . . And so from that then, we talked about the idea of social class, and to watch them make that connection between, “Oh this is what my high school life is, and then this is what the book is talking about.” And to see them stop and say, “Oh, wait a minute, yeah;” to see that click in their heads was just fascinating to me. And having the discussion, having them actually open up, was great. It happened with every class that year; they just got it. And I could see it later when they read the book more, they could understand better. We talked a little bit about
my days and how I was the band geek, and you could hear them kind of laugh about that, but it’s those kinds of moments where for some reason the curriculum, their lives, and my life, just all intersected at once. I thought, “Yeah, I made the right choice [to be at teacher] because I’m doing what I like to do, interact with the students, and the students are actually learning.” That was a particularly good day. (Interview 2, October 18, 2008)

**Success with difficult students.** Many of the teachers in this study stated that having success with the more difficult students they have taught has made them feel that they were doing a particularly successful job as a teacher. Jeff talked about a challenging student whose parent later nominated him for a county-wide teaching award:

Just recently I got nominated for [an award]. The person who won totally deserved it, and I was very surprised to even be nominated. It was done by somebody who was a parent of one of my former students that I had a really rough time with last year. I mean, an incredibly difficult time with both the student and the parents, but the fact that they nominated me because they saw the growth that the child made was really cool. (Interview 2, November 8, 2008)

Cindy described a situation when she was pleasantly surprised with a visit from a former student with whom she had had a difficult time the previous school year:

Well, right in August, a former student stopped in to tell me that I had changed his life. I was like, “You slept through my class. You didn’t even talk to me.” The more he talked, the more I was amazed. It’s really nice to know you reach them,
that you are doing some good, even when you think they’re not listening.

(Interview 2, November 9, 2008)

Linda talked about a very demanding situation in her first grade classroom. She had been dealing with a student who was new to the school district. He had severe behavioral and learning issues, and she was receiving very little help from the administration and even less from his guardians. She described her first sign of accomplishment with the child:

I have a child that has not yet been identified special education, but he comes from a very difficult family background . . . and he came into school with very little phonemic awareness, no identification of any numbers, he didn’t even know what they were, really just not ready for first grade, but we didn’t have any data on him to support that he should go back to kindergarten at that point . . . Well, at nine weeks of school, it’s too late to send him back to kindergarten. He’s here, and if he has to repeat first grade then that’s where he will be next year . . . Well, he wrote a complete sentence. And I cried on his desk . . . The fact that he wrote, and it was phonetically spelled, but the fact that he could write something that somebody else could read was huge. I wrote it down in [my critical incident log] . . . For him it was huge. For me it was huge, because I’ve never had a child come to my classroom with such poor skills. It was great . . . That was a really great fantastic shining moment. (Interview 2, November 22, 2008)

Overall, the teachers in this study perceived their work in the classroom as having a positive impact on their students, which therefore indicated to them that they were
successful teachers. Some participants were confirmed in these perceptions by the outward expressions of gratitude from both students and parents, some by official recognition of their hard work. Others were confirmed by seeing firsthand that their students were learning and finding success in their classrooms. Even though they perceived themselves as successful teachers, though, all seven of the participants found challenges in their new profession as well. The following section describes these challenges.

“Worst” experiences: People and policies outside of the classroom make them doubt their decision to become teachers. A second commonality in regard to the participants’ perceptions on their choice of teaching as a second career was found among the teachers’ descriptions of their most difficult moments in teaching, incidents which caused the participants to doubt their decision to become teachers. Each of the seven participants described his or her worst experiences in terms of interactions with people and policies outside of their classrooms. The people who were most commonly the source of frustration for the participants were the administrators of their respective buildings. This is especially true of the secondary level teachers, Jennifer, Don, Todd, and Cindy, who each depicted tumultuous relationships with their immediate supervisors. All seven participants also discussed in great detail the frustration they have with state and national policies on education. They described what they termed as an incredible “disconnect” between what they thought were the ideals and purpose of education and what they have found to be the actual reality of public schooling as it takes place in their buildings. The participants perceived that although schools and administrators at all
levels say that they want to do what is best for students, the reality is that schools are at
the mercy of policy makers. In addition, they believe that many of today’s policy makers
do not have the needed knowledge about educating young people. Overall, the seven
participants in this study expressed frustration with what they termed as the politics and
business-like nature of education that school officials try to hide behind a banner that
declares “Kids Come First.” The following two sections describe these frustrations with
administrators and school policies in more detail.

Frustration with administrators. Jennifer described her frustration in terms of
her changing standing in her department and high school building, stating that she
believed that she was originally hired as someone who could shake up the status quo, a
quality her administrators seemed to admire in her at the time she was hired. Over her
tenure in her building, however, she has felt that their opinion of her has
dramatically changed. She is currently having a difficult time with what she perceives to
be her new expectations:

There is, I think, more of hypocrisy in education a lot of times than there is in
business, because at least in business you know the bottom line is about money. I
mean, they usually do what they say they’re going to do. But in education they
say, “We want you to be a boat rocker,” but then later say, “Oh. That’s a little bit
more difficult than we anticipated. We want you to get involved with the kids and
come up with creative ideas to get the kids involved, but we’re not really going to
support you, and we’re certainly not going to give you the funding to do it.” It
always seems like they’re talking out of both sides of their mouths. And that is
very frustrating, particularly for someone who has come from a different background where they are used to it being a lot more straightforward and a lot less political. (Interview 2, November 1, 2008)

Don described the situation in his building in terms of an administrative identity crisis. He believes that the administrators want to appear to be pro-student and pro-teacher but in reality, they are more concerned about their own futures, much like politicians who are continually preparing for the next election:

I think part of the problem is image over substance . . . We need to look good. Our scores need to look good. Our fields need to look good. Our [uniforms] need to look good. But, you know, are we doing our jobs? And is there support for us to do our jobs? And in education, there has been a change. If a kid had a problem when I started 13 years ago, the parents would come in and say, “What’s my kid doing?” and now when parents come in, they say, “What are you doing to my kid?” I’m not sure, but it seems that administration now has gotten to the point where they are saying, “If a parent is coming in, it must be the teacher, or the coach, or it must be the new teacher.” They don’t get the fact that at some point you have to get some guts and some kind of backbone because they are worried about image, and administrators need to get their next contract and the next levy passed . . . I’m not sure the goal is always in the best interest of the kids. I think a lot of times it’s image, and I’m not sure that’s right, and that’s unbelievably frustrating. (Interview 2, October 27, 2008)
For Todd, it was a personal interaction with an administrator in his second year of teaching that caused him frustration with how his school is managed:

The big one for me was sitting with my administrator for my second year . . . she had come in and observed my classroom, and I had been having issues with the evaluation process, kind of being told, “You need to do this. You need to do this.” And so I was trying to do those things, making those strides, and then I went in, and actually I thought the lesson went great. Everything was fine. And my administrator told me that had this happened 10 days earlier that basically I wouldn’t have a job, because we had just missed the cut off time for letting teachers know whether they will be hired again. And I remember thinking, “I don’t even know [why you’re saying this].” . . . So that was just devastating, because I was looking at it, and even in the discussions, I was like, “I’m not even sure what you’re seeing that would be considered such a problem to have let me go.” And that was rough. That was a hard time, because I felt like I just couldn’t do anything right. . . . Part of the problem was, and I can’t verify this, but we were up for a levy at that point, and I was the highest paid second career teacher in the district, and . . . there’s part of me that felt like maybe they were building a case just in case they had to cut people. They could just say, “Yeah, he’s had bad evaluations, we can let him go.” Because the next year, I didn’t change a whole lot, but suddenly I was this great teacher, and so it was just like this very strange disconnect. [The] same administrator came back and was like, “I can’t believe how many changes you’ve made. You’re so much better this year.” . . . And I’m
thinking, “I’m really not doing anything different than I did last year.” (Interview 2, October 18, 2008)

Cindy expressed several areas of frustration with her administrators, including the fact that she was required to teach what she felt was an overly demanding schedule that included travel during the day to a local university to teach a dual-credit course. She described how she was assigned the class four days before school started:

The principal comes in [my classroom] and [says], “Oh yeah. I need to talk to you about your schedule . . . we’re giving you another class.” . . . So I have four preps now this year, [and] this course is taught at Stark State . . . We are on a block schedule, A, B, A, B. So on A days, I teach first period in my classroom. Second period I get in my car and I drive over to Stark State, and I teach the class over there in a garage with a fire truck in it, freezing cold, no technology, nothing. Then I have to go back to the high school, eat my lunch in my car, [and] teach third and fourth. I teach all 4 mods, so I literally start my day at 7:30. I’m done at 2:20. I eat my lunch in my car. I walk in the building and I have just enough time to go to the bathroom. (Interview 2, November 9, 2008)

In addition to the four secondary school teachers, Jennifer, Don, Todd, and Cindy, who related negative experiences with their supervisors, one elementary school participant, Craig, also described a frustrating incident that occurred in his classroom with his administrator:

One day, my principal walked into my classroom right after lunch and recess, and we have this lunch bin that the kids put their lunch boxes in before they go to
recess and at dismissal as they’re leaving they get their lunch out of there. Well, he wanted to change the procedure, and I guess I didn’t understand what he meant. He wanted them to be emptied after lunch and not at the end of the day . . . So it was after lunch and recess and we were just getting started with math . . . and there were five or six lunchboxes in my blue bin. He walks in, picks it up, dumps it out in the middle of the floor, and he says something about emptying it. I don’t remember what it was exactly, because I was completely shocked. And he walked out and he was doing it down the hallway, so there were several other classrooms he did it to also. And I’m dumbfounded. I’m thinking, “I can’t believe that.” And so I just said quietly [to the students] . . . “From now on we’re going to empty this right after lunch.” So I reached down and grabbed the lunchboxes and I said, “If any of these are yours, let’s put them away now.” So the kids got up and put them with their stuff. And I thought, “I can’t believe what just happened. You’ve got to be kidding me.” (Interview 2, October 24, 2008)

Frustration with educational policy. In addition to their struggles with their administrators in their specific buildings, the participants also talked about their negative experiences in terms of the struggle they have with the current state and national focus on standards, testing, and teacher accountability. They perceive that this focus is having a profound effect on their classroom, their teaching, and their students. Craig, in particular, strongly believes that his purpose in the classroom is to help his third grade students develop into mature, responsible members of society, not just test smart kids. He finds it
very challenging to put an intense focus on passing the state and national assessments, even though that is what his administrators expect him to do:

What’s questioning me wanting to stay a teacher is really this drive that we have all developed. We are like rabid dogs in my opinion. . . . Achievement, achievement, achievement, and then of course, [you have to] do all these other things too, the character development, all the other things. And . . . you can’t necessarily have it both ways always. [Education] has just changed and I really struggle with it. What really gets me excited and what’s really fun is seeing them develop and grow, and being able to have those one-on-one interactions and things like that, and we just don’t have time for it anymore. Being able to have time to remediate, when the hell do we have time for that? (Interview 2, October 24, 2008)

At the secondary school level, Todd finds it difficult to deal with the mandates as well. He talked about the new state graduation requirements and how it will affect the English department in his school:

The bad things are the usual, those things out of your control. The state of Ohio is now going to require all graduating high school seniors to take a personal finance course, which for some reason is delineating what we have as our speech and technology courses. They are claiming that the students don’t need the technology training because they learn that on their own, and I think, “Really? They learn PowerPoint on their own? Have you seen their PowerPoints?” And [the state] decide[s] to just move this speech stuff to English class. And I think,
“And where would you like us to do this? Between which books and which papers we are writing?” It is going to become a graduation requirement.

(Interview 2, October 18, 2008)

Generally, the teachers in this study, especially the four secondary level teachers, were frustrated by what they saw as the lack of strong leadership and administrative guidance at all levels of education, from their specific buildings, to their district offices, and even the state and national educational leaders. They believed that dealing with administrators was a challenge and often an obstacle to doing their job well. In response, several of the participants have taken to avoiding these negative situations by staying in their classrooms and out of the way of those in charge of their schools, thus trying to make each day a more positive and successful experience for both themselves and their students.

Summary. The participants in this study perceive themselves as successful when working with students. They are supported in this perception by what they observe in their classrooms and by the feedback that they are getting from students and parents about their impact on their students’ lives and academic success. On the other hand, the participants also perceive the constant intrusion and demands of all levels of administration as hindrances to them doing their best job in their classrooms. They expressed surprise and frustration with the amount of political input and control in a profession that they originally believed was in the hands of the educators. Table 5 is a brief summary of the events that each participant depicted when describing his or her best and worst moments in teaching.
Even though each teacher was easily able to describe negative experiences or incidents in their teaching where they have struggled, all seven participants in this study described many more incidents of positive reinforcement with regard to their decision to teach, and each believed that overall they have been successful in their new career. They perceived themselves as a benefit to both their school and their students. This perception of success is an important factor in the second theme identified in this study, that the participants perceive that they made the right decision to become teachers. This theme is discussed in detail in the following section.

**Perception of Teaching as the “Right” Decision**

The second major theme that resulted from the data of this study was that all seven participants in this study stated that they believe that they have made the right decision to choose teaching as a second profession. They base this perception on the belief that they are successful teachers and that their expectations with regard to personal and professional fulfillment have been met. Although all were able to describe both good and bad experiences in teaching, each was confident in the fact that he or she belongs in the field of education, and that the positive experiences they have had in many ways overshadow the negative.
Table 5

*Participants’ Best and Worst Teaching Experiences*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Best</th>
<th>Worst</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>Success with special education student in classroom</td>
<td>Difficulties with special education student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School received “Excellent” rating from state</td>
<td>Frustration with administration and lack of support with special</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>education student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craig</td>
<td>Parent compliment at ice cream social</td>
<td>Incident with administrator and the lunchbox bins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dinner at student’s home</td>
<td>Focus on achievement and not development of whole child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Email from former student’s mother</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeff</td>
<td>Email from former student on first day of school</td>
<td>The bureaucracy of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and administrative mandates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nominated for teaching award</td>
<td>Misunderstandings with parents about grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>Discussion in Advanced Placement class</td>
<td>Lack of support from administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communication with former students</td>
<td>Lack of motivation among many students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>Cards from former students</td>
<td>Interactions with administrators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Former students who stop to visit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Todd</td>
<td>Lesson with students on social class</td>
<td>Bad evaluation from administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Has become more part of school (doing school announcements,</td>
<td>State and national standards and mandates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>working gates at sporting events)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don</td>
<td>Cards from former students</td>
<td>Disconnect between school image and administrative policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visits from former students</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Grant approval</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Since all of the participants became teachers after having been gone from a classroom more than 10 years, they had many expectations about schools and what it would be like to be a teacher, anticipations colored by the participants’ own memories,
and different teacher preparation programs. The participants perceived that several of these expectations were fulfilled, leading to the perception that they had made the correct career choice. Every participant also found several surprises in his or her first few years of teaching despite the fact that each stated that he or she felt prepared to teach upon leaving his or her training program. Several commonalities emerged in the data in this study with regard to the perception that the participants made the right choice to become a teacher. This first commonality was that the participants perceived that their expectations of the profession were fulfilled through their relationships with their students and the positive impact they believed that they were making on their students’ lives. The second commonality was in regard to the surprises confronted by the participants in their first few years on the job. These surprises included the following: (a) societal stress, (b) clerical duties, (c) unsupportive administrators, and (d) difficult students. What follows is a detailed description of these two commonalities.

**Fulfilled expectations.** All seven participants in this study stated that since they have become teachers, their expectations have been met with regard to their sense of personal and professional fulfillment. They stated that they feel this satisfaction most when they are in their classrooms working with their students. In fact, when asked what they liked most about teaching, each mentioned the following: (a) the relationships that they are able to build with students, and (b) the opportunity to have a positive impact on their students’ lives both academically and personally. Both of these were desires the participants had hoped for upon making the decision to teach.
**Relationships with students.** All seven of the teachers in the study stated that getting to know their students well was a goal they had when entering the teaching profession. In addition, each believes that he or she has achieved that goal many times and with many different students thus far in their careers. Craig stated, “What I love is the interaction with the kids. That’s priceless” (Interview 1, July 21, 2008). For Don, it is the bond that he is able to build with his students by working with them daily:

It’s the day-to-day relationship. That’s really what it is. It’s a relationship that you have with the kids that exists beyond the classroom, beyond the four years that they are here, and the fact that you can positively affect their lives. (Interview 1, September 2, 2008)

Todd enjoys that his subject area, English, provides a great opportunity for him to truly get to know his students:

That’s the best part for me, working with the students, and getting to know them. That’s what’s nice about English, you get creative writing, and they chat . . . I like watching the students interacting with each other and to see them get something out of a story. (Interview 1, August 11, 2008)

Having built positive relationships with students is one way the participants in this study feel that they have been successful in their careers as teachers, and it helps confirm their perception that they are in the right profession.

**Having a positive impact on students’ lives.** In addition to getting to know their students, the teachers in this study talked about the goal of making a difference in their students’ lives either academically or personally. Achieving this goal has enabled the
teachers to confirm their belief that they made the correct decision to be a teacher. For Jennifer, knowing that she has been able to have a positive influence on her students’ futures allows her to feel confident in her decision to become a teacher. This is a much different sense of fulfillment than she had while working as a journalist:

What I do like is that I feel like I’m making a difference . . . And I do love it when kids come back, and a lot of them do. They either email me or they’ll actually come and visit and say, “You know, I hated doing that research paper, but thank God you made me do it, because that’s all we do in college.” (Interview 1, July 29, 2008)

Linda talked as well about positively affecting her students in the classroom and how knowing that she is helping them to learn confirms her perception that she made the right decision to be a teacher.

I love it when kids learn. I love seeing that light turn on for them and they’re like, “Oh, I do get it.” I especially love those, and I take them under my wing and really put them right into my heart, those that come in with any type of problem, whether it is a disability, a learning disability in a certain area, or an at-home concern. I know that I make a difference in their lives because they’re the ones especially that you can see a lot of growth in at [first] grade. (Interview 1, July 18, 2008)

In much the same way, Todd said that he knows that he made the right decision to teach because of how much he enjoys helping the students learn. He said that knowing
that he has the ability to help them learn and seeing them do so are the motivations for staying in the classroom:

[It’s] the feeling I have that I am using all of my gifts and all of those things that led me to teaching, that I am having the opportunity to explore . . . relationships with students, and to have an impact that way. [It’s] seeing that I do have the ability to help them to have that click, to have them learn. That’s the goal, and to see that happen on a regular basis and to feel that passion. (Interview 2, October 18, 2008)

Overall, the participants in this study believe that teaching is the correct professional field for them, and they feel that this belief is confirmed once again by the success that they have with their students both personally and academically in their classrooms. Each participant in the study plans to remain involved in education for many years to come.

**Surprises: What they did not expect.** The second commonality that was identified in this study with regard to the perception that the participants made the right choice to become teachers was the surprises each encountered as they began their teaching career. Although the teachers in this study found the personal and professional fulfillment they were looking for in teaching in regard to getting to know their students and helping them to be successful academically, and although all seven of the participants stated that they do believe that they are now in the right profession, each also found himself or herself confronted with a few unexpected situations over the tenure of his or
her classroom experience. These surprises included the following: (a) societal stress, (b) clerical duties, (c) unsupportive administrators, and (d) difficult students.

**Societal stress.** For three of the participants, Jeff, Linda, and Craig, the enormity of their job was the greatest revelation upon taking on their own classroom, and along with it were the stress and the societal pressure of doing that enormous job well. Craig said, “The job is huge. I don’t think I really fully comprehended that. I knew it was a big job, but I mean, it’s a huge job” (Interview 1, July 21, 2008). Linda concurred with Craig’s opinion about the size of the job:

> There’s a lot of pressure on teachers, and I wasn’t expecting the pressure. I don’t think I really understood until I was really immersed in it and realized that you’re not just there to help these kids or to teach them what you think you need to teach . . . You’re really held accountable for it, not just by testing, but . . . by the community. (Interview 1, July 21, 2008)

Even in the face of the difficult nature of the job and the pressure that comes with doing it well, all seven teachers stated that they made the right decision to be teachers and that they planned to continue their profession in education. They all echoed in different ways what Jeff stated, “It’s the hardest job that I’ve ever loved” (Interview 2, November 8, 2008).

**Clerical duties.** Other common surprises mentioned by the participants in this study were in regard to clerical duties such as the large amount of grading and the heavy documentation required in teaching. Jeff commented that he was surprised by the amount
of necessary recordkeeping in regard to special education students and also by the feedback required to teach students how to be good writers:

[One of the] hard issues [was] the amount of paperwork. I mean, I didn’t sign up to do paperwork. That’s not my job. I mean, it is my job, but it’s not my job. I really didn’t want to do paperwork. (Interview 2, November 8, 2008)

For Todd, as an English teacher, it was the amount of grading that surprised him the most:

I don’t think I had quite the grasp on the paper load aspect of things. . . In my head, all I had were movies and TV versions of classrooms where they have these talks and all of this, but you don’t see the stuff afterwards where they are sitting at home for hours just grading papers. (Interview 2, October 18, 2008)

The difficulties of working with either under or overly involved parents, which often require a large amount of written or oral communication was another type of clerical duty that surprised the participants. In addition, the amount of time outside of the school day needed to be fully planned and prepared to teach on a daily basis was difficult for several participants to get used to during their first few years of teaching. For Craig, coming from a business atmosphere of teaming and collaboration, the idea of working alone, “the isolationism” (Interview 2, October 24, 2008), as he termed it, made the lesson planning and preparation even more difficult at the beginning as he was not only learning how to teach, but getting to know his colleagues as well.

**Unsupportive administrators.** Issues regarding administration surfaced once again with Jennifer and Don, as they stated how surprised they were about how in their
teaching jobs they often feel cut off and unsupported by their school leaders. For Jennifer in particular, the politics of who teaches what particular classes and in what classrooms, the concept of “the golden child at the time” (Interview 2, November 1, 2008), meaning those teachers in favor with the administration, was a great disappointment. Both Jennifer and Don expressed frustration with what they perceived as their schools’ lack of efficiency and abundance of bureaucracy, especially in regard to the amount of time it seems to make decisions about what they feel is quite unambiguous. As Don described it, “I am surprised by the lack of support for what I think is fairly obviously right, and what I think most teachers would say is the right way to go” (Interview 2, October 27, 2008). He described in detail a committee in his building and how he believes it is simply a waste of everyone’s time:

[They have the committee] so that they can say they got [our] input . . . It’s a committee for committee’s sake, but we’re not going to accomplish anything because they’re going to do what they want to do anyway. That is really frustrating, because why have the committee? (Interview 2, October 27, 2008)

Frustration regarding administration was a theme that permeated much of the interviews, especially with the secondary level teachers, as most of the participants expressed great surprise and disappointment with the level of quality that they perceived in the administrators in their respective school buildings.

**Difficult students.** Finally, the lack of student motivation and the realities of trying to encourage uninterested students were other common surprises and disappointments among the secondary level teachers in this study. Jennifer stated that her
surprise most likely stemmed from the fact that her own experience as a student was much different from that of many of those teenagers in her current day classroom:

I was in [Advanced Placement] classes and we talked about big issues and used critical thinking skills. And I assumed, wrongly, that that’s how all of my classes would be, and we’d have this wonderful time. They would do their homework, we would sit around and talk about literature and how wonderful it was, and we would have these life-altering experiences. And even though in my education classes we talked about remediation and students with special needs, it really didn’t sink in until I was in the classroom, and I realized that most of them are not the [Advanced Placement] students. (Interview 2, November 1, 2008)

Cindy had a similar eye-opening experience during her first few year of teaching:

I had a very false perception of kids’ caring about learning, taking ownership of their learning. And you find that out right away. I mean, it’s amazing if you can get them to do their homework. No, it’s not what I expected. (Interview 2, November 9, 2008)

The difficulty of working with students who seem to lack the motivation and self-discipline needed for success in school was a common topic among the participants in this study, especially those working in the secondary school setting. For the elementary teachers, student motivation was not identified as a specific problem but rather these participants often felt frustrated by the requirements and challenges of working with special education students. Both Jeff and Linda described frustrations with the logistics
of students on or in the process of obtaining Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). Both participants were discouraged with the number of students on IEPs in their classes, and Linda was additionally frustrated with the lack of help she received from her colleagues, including special education teachers and her principal, especially in regard to one specific child who caused daily disturbances in her room (Linda, Interview 2, November 22, 2008). Jeff was discouraged by the additional clerical duties as well as what he saw as inconsistencies with regard to teaching students to be responsible and to enabling them to not be accountable for their own learning (Jeff, Interview 2, November 8, 2008).

**Summary.** Even with the difficulties and the pressures involved in teaching, each of the seven participants in this study stated unequivocally that they made the right decision to teach. And when questioned why they believe that teaching is the right profession for them, all seven returned to the feelings that they have when they close their doors to all of the outside influences, stresses, and pressures that are involved in education. They are happiest when they can get down to the business of getting to know their students and having a positive influence on their lives. That was the business they were looking for when they enrolled in their teacher preparation programs. Even with her demanding new schedule, Cindy still gets enjoyment from teaching English:

> As soon as the door shuts and the class starts, that’s when I feel my best. And I know that if I didn’t feel good when I’m up in the front of the class trying to teach them something that that would be the time to get out. I still feel the excitement and that spark and that electricity with the kids in the classroom. (Interview 2, November 9, 2008)
Jennifer concurs, “I think I am in the right career. I think I’m a good teacher. I think the kids benefit from me, [and] I think kids, especially in a district like I’m in . . . need someone like me” (Interview 2, November 1, 2008). Both Craig and Linda still find great passion for teaching. “I love what I am doing. I love helping people learn. I love being in that environment, and I love the kids. The kids are amazing. . . . I don’t regret the path that I’ve taken” (Craig, Interview 2, October 24, 2008). “I love what I do, even when I come home and I’m tired. I reflect back on my day and the things that some kids learned or did and what better place would you want to be?” (Linda, Interview 2, November 22, 2008). All seven of the participants echoed Linda’s sentiments, that they are in the right profession, and they plan to stay there in one form or another.

The next section of this chapter presents the theme identified across the participants in this study with regard to what they have specifically planned for their futures and what factors will cause them to either stay in or eventually leave their second chosen profession of teaching.

**Plans to Remain in Teaching Profession**

The third major theme that emerged as a result of the data analysis in this study was that all seven participants in the study plan to remain in the teaching profession, six in their present classrooms. The perception of personal and professional fulfillment, along with the perceived self-benefits of being a teacher will keep them in the profession until retirement.

Commonalities were identified in this study with regard to the factors that have influenced and will continue to influence the participants’ decision to remain in or to
leave the teaching profession. In their second interview, all seven participants stated that they believe that they made the right decision to become a teacher, and that perception, as discussed in the previous section of this chapter, is supported by their success in the classroom and is the foremost factor in determining that they will remain a teacher. There are additional common factors, however, that will influence their decision to stay in education and for how long they will stay. These include the following: (a) becoming a teacher was a well thought-out decision, (b) having a prior experience with teaching, (c) experiencing a push into teaching, (d) recognizing the perceived self benefits of teaching, (e) having no interest in becoming an administrator, and (f) having the ability to deal with the negative aspects of teaching. What follows is a description of each of these common factors in more detail.

**Becoming a teacher was well thought-out decision.** For all seven of the participants, deciding to become a teacher was not done on impulse, but rather it was a well deliberated and thought out decision. Although four of the participants, Linda, Craig, Jennifer, and Cindy, each considered teaching as a profession when making their first career choice, only two of the seven participants in the study, Jennifer and Cindy, stated that they actually left their first career with the specific intent of going into the classroom. Becoming a teacher for them was a type of professional correction, as they returned to what in actuality should have been their first career. Jennifer remembered wanting to be a teacher even as a child, but later struggling with the idea of what she considered as low salaries that teachers typically earn:
As a little girl I would wind up my dolls, and I had a chalkboard and I would teach. And I remember one summer in fifth or sixth grade, I was spending a night at a friend’s house and she lived right next door to the school. And we actually went into the school dumpster and we found all of these old worksheets. I would put them in front of my dolls and they would do them. They were totally a different grade [than I was in], so I didn’t really know what they meant, but I thought it was really cool to have actual teaching materials. So [teaching] was always in the back of my mind, but again, I kept thinking “Psychology. Teaching. If I’m a psychologist, I can charge fifty dollars a hour; in teaching I can’t do that.”

(Interview 2, November 1, 2008)

After changing her career plans from psychology to journalism while in college, Jennifer found herself in a profession that often frustrated or bored her. She eventually decided to pursue her true first career interest of teaching and now finds herself both happy and challenged as a teacher.

For Cindy, it was an issue of self-esteem that kept her from becoming a teacher the first time around. As a young woman, she didn’t feel as if she had the confidence to stand in front of a class and be the instructor.

I didn’t know what I wanted to do. I didn’t think that I wanted to teach, because I didn’t think I would be good at it . . . I thought, “I don’t have enough guts to give that a shot.” (Interview 1, August 19, 2008)
But after a few years as a paralegal and working with clients both in and out of a courtroom, Cindy found the self-assurance she needed to quit her job and pursue her first professional passion.

While Jennifer and Cindy gave up their first careers with the direct intent of going back to school and earning a teaching license, all of the other five participants in the study left their first job for a variety of other reasons including stress and family obligations. Eventually then, and often through a series of circumstances and self-reflection, Linda, Craig, Jeff, Todd and Don then found themselves making the decision to enroll in a teacher education program. Several of these participants looked to the advice of others as they were trying to decide on their second career. For example, Don went to career counseling in an effort to discover what path he should follow after leaving his optometry practice, and Cindy volunteered to work with her church’s youth groups to be certain she enjoyed working with teenagers before she quit the law firm.

Overall, the choice to become teachers was not a lighthearted one for any of the participants in this study. Craig talked about how he struggled to make the decision to leave his career in business:

I knew that I really needed to kind of get my act together, and I really had come to the realization that I needed to change mentally. I needed to move away from this idea that your value is determined by how much money you make. I really had let that drive me. . . . And so for the longest time, I had this kind of pressure to be the successful one. And I can remember being in college and my mother saying a lot that they were so proud of me. And that’s great, but that also became pressure to
me to be successful . . . [and] I was pretty good at putting pressure on myself. So I finally said, “You know what? Grow up. It has to be about quality of life.” I felt like my quality of life . . . was deteriorating. I said, “Let’s just be happy, and the rest will kind of take care of itself.” And so that was why I was really looking at a couple other options. (Interview 1, July 21, 2008)

So after he accepted his severance package from his last company, Craig took a year off to consider several options before finally deciding to teach.

Todd, who had left his youth pastor position due to philosophical differences with his parishioners, worked odd jobs for two years before deciding to go back to school and earn a teaching degree. He talked about the decision process, and stated that deciding to become a teacher was the result of a great deal of self-reflection and analysis.

Teaching kind of came about by thinking about what I was passionate about. I knew I liked working with teens, and I knew that I had a great love of theatre and a great love for literature in general, and I was thinking how I could use these, and so teacher just kind of surfaced to the top of things. (Interview 1, August 11, 2008)

Other factors influenced the participants’ decisions to become teachers as well. Linda stated that in her situation, while she didn’t leave the retail business with the intent to become a teacher, the eventual decision was most likely influenced in some way by the tradition of teaching that characterized her family:

In my family . . . grandmother a teacher, mother a teacher, sister a teacher, me a teacher. There’s that trend, and you always think, “Hmm, I see my mother as a
teacher. Could that be an option for me?” . . . And my sister is a teacher, in [the same district as me]. She teaches first grade also. (Interview 2, November 22, 2008)

Whatever the path the participants took to teaching, whether they came directly from their first professions, or after a period of time at home or in other work, the decision to teach was not one that was made quickly. It was after much thought and consideration, and this fact is a significant factor in the decision for these teachers to stay in the profession.

**Prior experience with teaching.** The second common factor that emerged as a determinant in the length of the participants’ tenure in the teaching profession was in regard to prior experience with teaching before deciding to make a career change. As described in their biographies, along their first career paths, each of the seven participants had his or her desire to teach triggered or supported by an event or interaction with others, and often this experience was part of or closely associated with his or her first profession. For example, Craig was asked to teach training courses as part of his management duties and Jeff worked with the college interns in his office. Other participants had the experience of working in actual classrooms; Linda was a substitute teacher in an elementary school, and Jennifer taught college orientation classes and later critical thinking classes at a local university. Several of the participants used the expression “caught the teaching bug” when describing the events that led them to the idea that education may be an option as a career, even if that event occurred years before they actually made the decision to teach. Often it was these introductions to teaching that the
participants relied upon to believe that education was the correct path for them to follow. They remembered the incidents fondly, as they found not only joy, but success, in the experiences. In choosing to enroll in a teacher program, each participant aspired to attain some sort of the accomplishment that he or she found during the previous taste of teaching, no matter how brief that occurrence may have been. Having this experience prior to making the career shift allowed the participants to feel some confidence in their ability to be successful in the classroom. This confidence is a factor in the decision about staying in the teaching profession.

Don stated that although he had always wanted to coach, teaching was never really an option for him until he started to conduct vision therapy seminars for college students. “I never, I never, in undergrad, ever, considered education, never. It never crossed my mind, until I got to Ohio State and started doing it, and I was like, ‘This is fantastic’” (Interview 1, September 2, 2008). Jeff had a similar experience, as he never contemplated teaching as a career option until he worked with the college interns who would frequent his advertising office.

I would say to them, “Pick my brain. What do you want to know? I’m not an expert . . . but I have street smarts. What do you want to know?” . . . [and I would give them advice.] I really enjoyed that aspect of it. That’s when I thought, “I can do this. This is kind of cool.” (Interview 1, August 12, 2008)

Craig said that while he enjoyed teaching the training classes during his first career, at the time never envisioned his future as an elementary school teacher.
I kind of got a little taste for [teaching], and I really enjoyed it. Although at the time, I don’t think I would have imagined teaching third grade. I think at the time I would have imagined maybe teaching at the college level or something like that... I was very used to being in front of people, but... only adults, not kids. (Interview 2, October 24, 2008)

These experiences with teaching provided an impetus for the participants to consider education as a field in which they could find success. The participants continue to rely on these experiences and the feeling of success that stem from these experiences as factors in their perception that they are in the right career. These experiences, therefore, are one of the determining factors to their decision to stay or leave the teaching profession. Table 6 is a summary of each participant’s early encounters with teaching.

**A push into teaching.** A third commonality in regard to the factors that will keep the participants in the teaching profession is that each described a person or an event that pushed him or her make the final decision to enroll in a teacher education program. Choosing to make a career change, especially one which involves pursuing another degree or licensure, is a major life event, and it affects one’s entire family. In six of the seven situations of this study, the participants were married, four of them with children, when they decided to go back to school on a fulltime basis. In addition, many of the participants were facing a rather significant change in salary and professional status as they prepared to be first year teachers. The decision to become a teacher, therefore, was not a carefree one, but rather one that was made, committed to, and supported by each participant and his or her entire family. In addition, each participant had a specific
Table 6

Participants’ Prior Experience With Teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Prior Experience With Teaching</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>Substitute teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craig</td>
<td>Taught training courses in first job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeff</td>
<td>Worked with college interns in first job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>Taught orientation class during senior year of college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Taught critical thinking class while working as a journalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>Working one-on-one with clients at first job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Volunteered to work with church youth group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Todd</td>
<td>Worked with high school students as youth pastor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don</td>
<td>Teaching seminars at a university during first job</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

influence, whether a person or an event, that represented his or her final push toward education as a career. It was this push that finally enabled each person to officially enroll in a teacher education program and begin their journey toward their second career.

Jennifer described her situation as she was growing more and more frustrated with her journalism job with the trade magazine:

I had put an ad in the paper for tutoring . . . [and] I had always known that teaching was where I wanted to be. My husband and I kept talking, and I would say, “Well, at some point I’ll go back to school.” And finally I was at my wits end, and I had gotten into kind of a big fight with a coworker too. So on top of being bored, on top of not liking what I’m writing, and now I have this conflict
with my coworker, I just came home and would vent and vent, and [my husband] was like, “You just need to go back to school. You need to do this. The right time isn’t going to happen to you. You need to make it happen.” So that’s when I actually emailed [a friend] and asked her about the [Master of Arts in Teaching] program she went through. When I looked into it and found out it was only 11 months, I thought, “I can do that.” (Interview 1, July 29, 2008)

Craig described himself as a “wreck” both physically and mentally as he struggled with a great deal of stress and pressure from his management job with a company that fiscally was not doing well. He gladly accepted the severance deal that he was offered from this company. The deal allotted him some time to reevaluate his goals and professional choices, but he found that he was unsure about his next career venture. That changed, however, when his wife encouraged him into going after what he really wanted to do rather than what he felt he should do.

I was still interviewing with some companies who dealt in fuels and other businesses, but every time I went to the interview I [thought], “Do I really want to do this again?” . . . . and so I just processed a lot of this with [my wife] and she was very supportive. She said, “Do what you want to do.” (Interview 1, July 21, 2008)

Jeff’s experience was similar to that of Craig’s, as he decided to leave his advertising agency and stay home to take care of his first born daughter, thinking that eventually he might want to become a teacher.
I had interviewed to leave that agency . . . In fact, I had been recruited out, and I went in for the first interview. It went great. I went in for the second interview, and it went great. And I thought, “The job is mine. I get one more call and the job is mine.” And I sat down and said, “You know what? Do I really want this?” So I called them up, and I said, “Thank you, but no . . . I’m burnt.” So here’s the thing; here I am . . . and when I told [my wife] I wanted to go teach, she said, “Alright. Take out a loan. You’ve got two years to make it happen. I don’t care how you do it. Two years. After two years, job or teaching, I don’t care what you’re doing. You’ve got to make it happen.” So I did it. (Interview 1, August 12, 2008)

In Don’s situation, both his spouse and his children were involved in the decision for him to leave his optometry practice and to commit himself to teaching:

“[My wife] was very supportive . . . I’m blessed. I’m married to an angel, and I don’t say that in jest. Unless she was supportive of what I was doing, it wouldn’t happen. She made a job change too, and I was supportive of her as well. Mine was more major than hers was, but it was important that we were on the same page. And the kids too, they had to be supportive. [They] were pretty young when we made the change. (Interview 1, September 2, 2008)

In addition to family support, friends and colleagues were mentioned by the participants as influences on their decisions to be teachers. Both Todd and Don described specific instances when they were told by friends and colleagues that they would be good teachers. In addition to the support from her husband, Cindy was encouraged by her
former high school English teacher. For Linda it was a conversation with her administrators during her substitute teaching that caused her to consider teaching seriously:

I ended up doing [a long term substitute position] for four full months, and I loved every minute of it. And the kids loved me, and the parents loved me . . . and so the principal and assistant principal shortly before my time was up and [the teacher] was coming back, pulled me into their office and said, “We just want to let you know that you are an awesome teacher, and we are so sad that you don’t have your education degree and that we can’t hire you if we wanted to, and we recommend that you get your degree in education. This is the field that you should be in.” (Interview 1, July 18, 2008)

All seven of the participants in this study made the decision to teach after much consideration and discussion with both friends and family. And in each instance, the final push towards the second career came as an opportunity or as a suggestion from someone they trusted. Having others support and encourage their decision to teach is another factor that keeps the participants in their second profession. This support confirms the participants’ perception that they made the right choice when they decided to become a teacher. Believing that they are in the right profession is the most important factor for keeping the participants in teaching. Table 7 is a summary of the specific influences that pushed the participants to enroll in a teacher education program and to begin the process of becoming classroom teachers.
Table 7

Participants’ Push Into Teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Push into Teaching</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>Compliments and suggestion of principal and assistant principal during substitute teaching experience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Craig       | Offered a severance package from first job  
|             | Support from wife  |
| Jeff        | Birth of first daughter  
|             | Support from wife  |
| Jennifer    | Husband could tell was miserable in first profession and encouraged change  
|             | Negative interaction with difficult coworker  |
| Cindy       | Husband encouraged job change  
|             | Discussion with her own former high school English teacher  |
| Todd        | Told by friends that he would be a good teacher  |
| Don         | Told by many people that he would be a good teacher  
|             | Support from wife and children  |

Perceived self-benefits of teaching. The fourth commonality found in this study with regard to the factors that will influence the participants’ decisions to stay or remain in education was the perception of several self-benefits of teaching. As mentioned, six of the seven participants plan to stay in teaching until retirement and do not plan to pursue a third career. The timeframe of this retirement, or exit from teaching, however, will depend on a variety of factors according to each participant, most notably being the such perceived self-benefits of teaching as good-quality health insurance, the convenience of the school calendar with regard to holidays and summer vacations, and the autonomy of the classroom, especially once the door closes each morning. Although only one
participant mentioned these benefits when describing their decisions to become teachers, they were often discussed when talking about leaving the classroom, and they were perceived as factors that will keep these participants in the classroom setting as long as possible. When talking about the benefits that come with teaching, Cindy remarked:

This is the best job there is. You’re not going to find a job where you get as good as health benefits as we get. We get a lot of time off in the summer. We get all the holidays off. Frankly, there’s no other job where you have all that. (Interview 2, November 9, 2008)

Don agreed, especially about the time teachers get off from work. For Don, this is very different from working as an optometrist when he was on call most of the time.

“We get everyday off known to man. We get some that aren’t known to man. We get the summers off. We get weekends off. If the weather’s crappy, we get off” (Interview 2, October 27, 2008).

Linda talked about the security of the teaching profession especially in the current economic situation that many families, including her own, find themselves:

Everyday I’m grateful that I have this job, especially when [my husband] is in the position where he doesn’t have a job. I have a contract. I’m tenured, and I know that I’m not going anywhere unless I do something really wrong which I would never do. And then I have the opportunity to make additional money by tutoring. (Interview 2, November 22, 2008)

Todd sees the independence of having his own classroom as a huge benefit in relation to other professions:
We have a great deal of freedom. I mean we have [curriculum maps], and we’ve decided what books to teach. We’ve talked about assignments, paper types, like research papers, a narrative; those things are all in place, because we have five different teachers teaching sophomore English. We have those in place but how we approach those things differs from class to class and teacher to teacher.

(Interview 2, October 18, 2008)

As long as the participants in this study perceive some self-benefits associated with the teaching profession, they are more likely to remain in the classroom and deal with those issues that challenge and frustrate them.

**No interest in becoming administrators.** A fifth commonality found among all seven participants in this study was that not one of them had any interest in pursuing a career in administration, even though many of them came from first careers where the goal was to climb the status and financial ladders. Six of the seven participants were very adamant about not ever wanting to be an administrator. Jennifer said, “I thought about administration. And as much as I think I’d be a really good administrator because of my background with business, I don’t want to give up that connection with the kids” (Interview 2, November 1, 2008). Even Don, who at one time ran his own medical practice remarked, “I’m not going anywhere else. Teaching is it for me” (Interview 2, October 27, 2008). And Linda said, “Administration? No, thank you” (Interview 2, November 22, 2008). Only for Jeff was the idea of being an administrator not out of the question, but much like the others, he stated, “That’s not why I got into this. I really do enjoy the kids” (Interview 2, November 8, 2008). Each participant stated that one of his
or her goals when becoming a teacher was to get to know his or her students well and to make a difference in their lives. Each participant made the choice to become a teacher after much deliberation and self-reflection. And each participant perceives that they are successful in their role as a teacher. They plan, therefore, to stay in the classroom.

Another contributing factor to the reason why the participants do not plan to pursue administration may be the common overall negative opinion of administrators that was expressed by the majority of the participants, especially the four at the secondary school level. Many of the participants’ worst experiences in their teaching careers involved their building principals, and in response, the participants stated that they currently try to avoid interactions with their supervisors when possible. This negative view of administration and the belief that they personally are successful as classroom teachers most likely are two specific causes why these teachers do not wish to leave their classroom and pursue an administrative career path. As Todd stated, “I went into teaching to teach” (Interview 2, October 18, 2008).

**Ability to deal with negative aspects of teaching.** The sixth and final commonality with regard to the factors that will influence the participants’ length of service in education is the perceived ability that each felt they had to deal with the negative aspects of teaching. Although all seven participants in this study were easily able to describe negative incidents in their classroom experiences, none of them felt that those events or similar types of events would ever be impetus enough to cause them to leave teaching as a career. As Todd remarked, “For the most part I look at those [negative] things, and you just realize that those are always going to be there, and you are
just going to have to find a way to work with or around them” (Interview 2, October 18, 2008). In fact, when asked what would cause them to make an early exit from teaching, the participants spoke in extremes, as if the possibility was very unlikely. Jennifer said, “The only thing [that would make me leave] would be some sort of civil liberties violation” (Interview 2, November 1, 2008), and Todd said, “Teaching is pretty much it, unless something very bizarre would happen . . . I would have to become director of a theatre group or something like that” (Interview 2, October 18, 2008).

The only plausible cause for early exit from teaching that was common among participants was the eventual lack of enjoyment in the job. This would be a sign that it would be time to retire or simply leave the profession. As Jeff stated, “If it gets to the point where I dread getting up, then I’ll start thinking [it’s time to go], but until that comes, I don’t want to think about it” (Interview 2, November 8, 2008). As second career teachers, each participant came to teaching with the desire to have a career that was fulfilling and both professionally and personally enriching. According to their interviews, they found this type of career in teaching. When and if that fulfillment would waver, the participants stated that they would first consider leaving their respective schools, but most likely not the profession, until they were ready to be finished with the job market altogether.

Summary. All seven of the participants in this study stated that they plan to stay in education as long as they continue to work. Six of the seven participants in this study plan to stay in the public school environment, either the same classroom or one similar, for the duration of their career in education. Whereas most do not plan to work the
necessary 30 or 35 years required to attain full retirement benefits, none of the participants plans to leave education before they reach retirement age.

Craig is the only participant in this study who has definite plans to leave his particular classroom within the next five years. Having his daughter born with Down’s Syndrome has inspired Craig’s newfound passion for special education and how to embrace it in the regular classroom. He has already begun to volunteer with local agencies, and he has even developed a seminar that he has presented for several schools and university classes. The seminar focuses on how to make Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) a useful tool when dealing with special education students rather than looking at them simply as a mandate to follow so that no one gets sued. Craig said that it is in this field of special education that he sees his near future, and he hopes that within five years he is able to be working full time helping students, teachers, and administrators assist special needs students in their own schools.

Even as the other six participants in the study do not have plans to leave public education, several of them did mention other avenues within their schools that may interest them enough to lure them away from their specific classrooms at some point in their teaching careers. Jennifer is attracted to gifted education:

Gifted is where I need to be. It’s always what I focused on, even in my [teacher education] program. When we were talking about IEPs, I always wanted to shift the conversation, “What about the other kids that have special needs, just on the other end of things?” I tend to go on the gifted fieldtrips with the gifted
coordinator at my school. In fact, I just went on one this week, and I was talking with her about getting my gifted certification. (Interview 2, November 1, 2008)

For Linda, being a reading specialist in her district is one of her future goals:

There was a reading specialist position open at [my school], and I thought about that. That’s a possibility for me, definitely. In the long run, if my husband had a position where I could just work part time, I would like to even be a reading position for just part time, still staying in there and making a good positive difference with the kids because I am a very, very strong reading teacher. That’s definitely my strength, so I would definitely stick with that strength and then go part time if I could. (Interview 2, November 22, 2008)

All seven of the participants in this study stated that they plan to stay in education for many years, and although they may expand from their current classrooms, they have no plans to pursue an entirely new profession. The next section of this chapter describes in more detail the commonalities and differences between the elementary and secondary level participants in this study.

**Commonalities and Differences Between Elementary and Secondary Level Participants**

The fourth major theme that emerged as a result of this study was that both commonalities and differences exist between the perceptions of those participants teaching at elementary level and those at the secondary level. This section of the chapter explores these commonalities and differences in detail.
Commonalities. The most important commonality across all seven of the participants in this study is that all of the participants, whether elementary or secondary level teachers, perceive that they made the right decision to become teachers. Secondly, all the participants, both at the elementary and the secondary levels, plan to stay in the field of education, whether in their current public school classrooms or in similar settings. Finally, whereas each participant had his or her own individual journey to becoming a teacher, whether he or she became an elementary level or secondary level teacher, each followed a similar path which included the following (not necessarily in this order): (a) disenchantment with the first career; (b) a successful encounter with the teaching profession; (c) an impetus to enroll in a teacher education program; (d) support and encouragement from family and friends; (e) the perception that they were successful in their work as a teacher, as confirmed by outward expressions of gratitude by students and parents or observations of student learning in one’s own classroom; and (f) affirmation that they made the right decision to become a teacher.

Differences. Although as mentioned, there were several similarities between the subgroups of elementary level and secondary level teachers in this study, there were two notable differences as well, one in regard to their relationships with their administrators and the other in regard to the challenges they face with certain subgroups of students.

Relationship with administration. One distinction that emerged between the elementary school and the secondary school participants in this study was the relationship that the two groups had with their administration. Whereas Craig, a third grade teacher, related an incident that resulted in his negative opinion of his principal (Interview 2,
October 24, 2009), this negative view of administration was not commonplace among the elementary level participants. In fact, all three elementary level participants, including Craig, at some point in their interviews spoke positively about their building principals. Linda related a story about how her principal helped to calm her down after a particularly difficult day (Interview 2, November 22, 2008), and both Craig and Jeff shared instances in which they felt both respected and well treated by their building administrators (Craig, Interview 1, July 21, 2009; Jeff, Interview 1, August 12, 2008).

All four of the secondary teachers, on the other hand, related more than one negative incident involving the administration in their districts. At no time did any of the secondary level participants in this study mention a positive incident that focused on or even included an administrator. In addition, three of the four participants talked very negatively overall about the administrative team in their particular buildings, most specifically the lead principal. Don stated, “It’s gotten to the point where the ineptness is becoming stifling in the day-to-day operations” (Interview 2, October 27, 2008), and Jennifer referred to her principal as a “lame duck” (Interview 2, November 1, 2008). Even with these lackluster opinions of their immediate supervisors, however, all of the secondary participants in the study do plan to remain in the teaching profession, as they see their situation changing sometime in the near future. Cindy said, “I just don’t like the principal. I mean, principals come and go though. I tell myself I can do it because he’ll be gone eventually” (Interview 2, November 9, 2008). The other secondary level participants echoed this sentiment as they described ways in which they were dealing with the situation until the time that it would pass.
**Student challenges.** A second distinction noted between elementary and secondary level teachers in this study was in relation to the difficulties they had with their students. As described earlier, three of the four secondary level teachers stated that they were disappointed with the overall quality of their students’ academic drive and motivation (Jennifer, Interview 2, November 1, 2008; Cindy, Interview 2, November 9, 2009; Todd, Interview 2, October 18, 2008). They were surprised by the number of students who seem uninterested or unwilling to participate in their own education, and they found it a challenge to work with this type of student, especially in their first few years of teaching.

The elementary teachers on the other hand did not speak about the lack of motivation or the lack of interest in learning in their classrooms. They focused instead on the challenges of working with special education students (Linda, Interview 2, November 22, 2008; Jeff, Interview 2, November 8, 2008). These challenges included not only in-class behavioral management issues, but dealing with the documentation and lesson adaptations required for their academic needs as well. They stated that in many ways they did not feel qualified to address the specific and varied needs of some of the more needy students in their classes.

**Summary.** Both commonalities and differences were identified between the elementary level and secondary level participants in this study. Most notably are those commonalities that resulted in the emergence of the other three major themes of this study: (a) all seven of the participants perceive themselves as successful teachers, (b) all seven of the participants perceive that they made the right decision to become teachers,
and (c) all seven of the participants plan to stay in the field of education for the remainder of their employment years. The differences identified between the elementary level and secondary level participants in this study are a reflection of the very distinct types of students and school buildings that characterize the daily work atmospheres of these two subgroups of teachers.

**Conclusion**

This chapter outlined the four major themes that emerged from this study as a result of systematic data analysis. In addition, it provided evidence from the data collected during the study from the seven participants to support the themes that were discussed. This evidence confirmed that these themes answered the study’s original research question and sub-questions. The following chapter, Chapter 5, provides a discussion of the relationship between the findings that emerged as a result of this study and the related literature on career theory, mid-life career change research, and the literature on second career teachers as reviewed in Chapter 2. In addition, future implications and suggestions for further educational research are presented.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This chapter provides an overview of the study. In addition, it includes a discussion of the relationship between the findings that emerged as a result of this study and the related literature on career theory, career transition research, and the literature on second career teachers as reviewed in Chapter 2. Finally, in this chapter, future implications and suggestions for further educational research are presented.

Overview of the Study

I chose a qualitative research design for this study because I wanted to understand the perceptions of second career teachers on their choice of teaching as their profession. Qualitative research can provide the specific detail needed for this understanding. First, I conducted a review of the literature with a concentration on three major areas. These were: (a) career theory, (b) career transition theory, and (c) the research specific to second career teachers. Since the early 1990s, when the literature on second career teachers was at its peak, the research on this subgroup of the teaching force has concentrated on three distinct areas. These are: (a) research regarding the alternate certification and licensure programs that prepare second career teachers for the classroom, (b) research regarding the motivation behind choosing teaching as a second career, and (c) research comparing the similarities and differences between second career and first career teachers with regard to their education and/or induction into the classroom. Through my review of the literature as well as my experience with my own
pilot study on second career teachers, I found that the majority of the research on second career teachers concentrated on their experiences either during the years of their teacher preparation or the first year or two of their careers.

Powers (2002) was the only study that I found that researched second career teachers beyond their second year in the classroom. He interviewed second career teachers in their third year of teaching with the goal of understanding the relationship they had with their administration. I was unable to find research which investigated my specific interest in second career teachers, their perceptions of their choice to be a teacher, and whether they are satisfied with teaching and plan to stay in the profession or whether they are discouraged with teaching and plan to leave. This gap in the literature inspired me to ask the specific questions which became the basis for this study. They are:

What perceptions do second career teachers have of their choice of profession?
1. What factors influence these perceptions?
2. Do they perceive that they made the “right” decision?
3. What factors influence their decision to remain in or leave the teaching profession?
4. What are the similarities and differences between the perceptions of secondary and primary level teachers?

I began the study looking for participants through the suggestions of personal and professional contacts. Eight participants were chosen based on criteria sampling. The criteria were: (a) each participant was a second career teacher, defined in this study as someone who has earned an original university degree in an area other that education and
who subsequently worked in that degree area; (b) each participant worked in his or her first career for a minimum of five years; (c) each participant was truly invested in his or her first career, meaning the decision to change careers was not trouble-free; and (d) each participant has been a teacher for a minimum of four years. While I began the study with eight participants, one participant removed himself from the study after the first interview and was not replaced.

Data was collected through formal interviews. I interviewed each participant three times over a 10-month period. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and was digitally recorded. All first and second interviews were transcribed and reviewed by each respective participant. In addition to the series of three interviews, each participant in this study kept a critical incident log for the time period between his or her first and second interviews, a minimum of six weeks. In the log, each participant recorded experiences that either confirmed or caused doubt regarding his or her decision to become a classroom teacher. This log was then used as a basis of discussion in the participant’s second and third interviews.

Throughout the study, recursive data analysis and data collection occurred. After conducting the first interview with each of the participants, I transcribed the interview. After transcribing the interviews for all seven participants, I then read, reread, and coded all of the transcripts for commonalities. These commonalities were subsequently discussed with each participant and were also used as the basis for the creation of some of the interview questions for the second interview. This process was repeated after each participant’s second interview. The third interview was predominantly used as a means
to clarify or correct any information given in the first two interviews as well as a way to member check the proposed implications of the study and recommendations for future research.

The analysis of the data provided by the participants in this study resulted in the emergence of the following four themes:

1. All seven participants in the study perceive themselves as successful teachers. They base this perception on the success of their students which they are aware of by either the feedback from students and/or parents, official recognition by a state agency, or by personal observation of students in their classrooms.

2. All seven participants in the study perceive that they made the right decision to become teachers. They base this perception on the belief that they are successful teachers and that their expectations with regard to personal and professional fulfillment have been met.

3. All seven participants in the study plan to stay in education, six in their present classrooms. The perception of personal and professional fulfillment, along with the perceived self-benefits of the teaching profession, will keep them in the profession until retirement.

4. Both commonalities and differences exist between the perceptions of secondary level and elementary level second career teachers. The most notable differences include the following: (a) secondary level teachers perceived themselves in conflict with their administration, while elementary
level teachers did not; (b) secondary level teachers perceived the lack of student motivation as a challenge to their success as teachers; and (c) elementary level teachers focused on the challenges of special education as a perceived obstacle to their achievement as teachers.

Several of the themes found in this study are supported by the investigations of other educational researchers. These themes as well as those that are unique to this study are discussed in the next section of this chapter.

**Relationship of Study to Previous Research**

The following sections of this chapter provide a discussion of the relationship between the findings that emerged as a result of this study and the related literature as reviewed in Chapter 2 on career theory, mid-life career change research, and the literature on second career teachers.

**Career Theory**

The data in this study supports the theory discussed in the literature review that career development is a continuous and on-going process. Both Ginzberg (1972) and Super (1990) in their updated versions of their career theories recognized that the experimentation with careers can occur well into adulthood as a person constantly changes his or her self-image and therefore looks for an occupation that is consistent with that self-image. In this study, Craig, for example, as a young high school graduate, saw himself as a successful businessman with professional status and wealth. For this reason, even though he had an interest in teaching, he chose to enroll in college as a marketing major and pursue his first career in business. In his mind, this was the means to fulfilling
that self-image of a rich and successful businessman. Years later, when Craig’s priorities changed and the stress of his job began to increase dramatically, he decided that success can be defined in different terms. Craig’s self-image changed and the pursuit of status and wealth no longer defined who he wanted to be. In doing so, his career aspirations were altered as well. The career change process for Jeff was similar to that of Craig’s, as the birth of Jeff’s first child modified his perceptions of himself and his career. His self-image transformed dramatically from businessman to father. In view of that transformation, he then changed his career.

As discussed in the literature review, Holland’s theory (1973) focused on the relationship between one’s personality and his environment. He suggested that when people leave one profession to pursue another it is usually due to a lack of harmonization between the person, their interests and skills, and the environment in which they worked. In this study, the career shifts of Jennifer, Don, and Todd all support this theory. Each found themselves in careers that eventually did not synchronize with their professional aspirations: Jennifer found herself bored and uninspired in journalism; Don was weighed down with insurance issues and long hours; and Todd had serious philosophical differences with his parishioners. When this lack of harmonization became unbearable, each of these participants decided to change his or her career environment and pursue one that would provide more personal and professional satisfaction.

In regard to Erikson’s (1963) Adult Development Model, which was also discussed in the review of the literature, three of his stages are relevant to this study and supported by the data collected from the seven participants. First is the stage of \textit{Identity}
versus Role Confusion. As described earlier in relation to both Ginzberg’s (1972) and Super’s (1990) theories, several participants in this study changed the image they held of themselves for various reasons throughout the course of their first career. This change in self-image caused doubt and confusion about the choice of that first career and the eventual departure from it. In addition, both Erikson’s Intimacy versus Isolation stage, when people are willing to commit themselves to meaningful relationships with others, and his Generativity versus Stagnation stage, when adults are primarily interested in establishing and guiding the next generation, are relevant to this study on second career teachers. The key to both of these stages is the ability for an adult to focus on the needs of others. This desire to positively affect the lives of others was mentioned many times as a factor which motivated the participants in this study to choose teaching as their second career. Jeff, for example, stated that he realized, upon the birth of his daughter, that he wanted to make a difference in the world not only for her, but for others. Jennifer related the story about her realization of the futility of her job at the trade magazine, simply moving papers from one office to another. This realization inspired her to pursue a career in which she could have a more positive impact on society and the future.

Career Transitions

In line with Bejian and Salomone’s (1995) theory about career renewal, the participants in this study after several years in their first career found the need to reevaluate and change their chosen career paths. According to these researchers, this type of career reevaluation and change is becoming quite common in today’s workforce.
for a variety of reasons, from personal and family issues, to situations in the job market, including the downsizing and reorganization of businesses.

Jones (1992) discussed five factors which facilitate job change, several of which are supported with the data from this study. His first factor is similar to what occurs in Erikson’s (1963) *Generativity versus Stagnation* stage, the desire for more meaning and personal success from work. As previously mentioned, this desire to give back to society and to make a difference in the lives of others was a significant motivational factor for the participants in this study as they chose teaching for their second career. Jones’ second factor for facilitating job change is dissatisfaction with one’s boss and/or coworkers or impersonal work environments. This factor was seen in several of the participants’ situations in this study: Jennifer stated that she had had a negative interaction with a coworker which was one of the final pushes toward leaving that career; Craig was at his limit with regard to the stress and isolation in his management job; and Jeff was frustrated by demanding and unsatisfied clients. Jones’ factors regarding more flexible social attitudes toward career changing and the willingness of partners to help one another to change careers were also both evident in each of the transitions to teaching by the participants in this study. Each participant had a specific advocate for his or her change to teaching, whether it was a family member or a colleague. In addition, several participants mentioned that while some of their friends questioned their desire to accept a demotion in professional status or salary, overall their decision to change careers was accepted and supported within their social circles.
Murray et al. (1971), in line with Holland’s career theory (1973, 1977), described a career in two dimensions, that of self and that of environment. As outlined in the literature review, they described four types of work histories: the routine career, the self-determined career, the situationally determined career, and the self-directed accommodation career. In this study all seven participants would fall into the work history of the self-determined career, which is described as job changes that the individual instigates due to the desire for more challenging, interesting, leisurely, or economically advanced work. The research on why people specifically choose teaching when making a career shift is much more applicable to the situations of the individuals in this study. This research on second career teachers and its relation to the themes that emerged from this study are discussed in the next section of this chapter.

Second Career Teachers

Several of the commonalities found in the data of this study are supported by the research on second career teachers conducted by other educational researchers.

Motivation for choosing teaching as second career. In the literature review I reviewed the classification system of three different groups of theorists and their findings with regard to the motivations of second career teachers to choose a career in education. Although it was not a purpose of this study to find teachers that represented the different classifications, I believe that it is valuable to look at the participants in regard to the current research in the field. In this section of the chapter, I discuss how the participants in this study fit into each of these systems.
Crow, Levine, and Nager. Four participants in this study considered teaching as a first career. According to Crow et al. (1990), these participants would be classified as “homecomers,” since at some point they aspired to become a teacher, but had their plans frustrated by one or more factors such as negative parental or societal attitudes, financial responsibilities, or job market forces. For Jennifer and Cindy, this classification is obvious since they intentionally left their first occupation with the intent to return to what in actuality should have been their first career. For Linda and Craig, the classification fits as well, despite the fact that, unlike the other two, they did not quit their first jobs with the distinct objective of becoming a teacher. Their eventual arrival in the classroom signified for them a type of liberation from the pressure of doing what they felt they should do professionally as opposed to what they truly wanted to do. For all four of the “homecomers,” teaching currently provides a sense of both personal and professional fulfillment that they were not able to obtain in their first career.

The other three participants in this study, Jeff, Don, and Todd, would be classified as “converted,” according to the categories as defined by Crow et al. (1990). Each, over time, became disillusioned and frustrated with his first profession and consequently came to teaching with the hopes of finding the same fulfillment pursued by the “homecomers.” For Jeff, it was his “whiny clients” and the feeling that he was not making much of a difference in the world (a thought inspired by the imminent arrival of his first child) that motivated him to eventually leave his first profession in search of a professional satisfaction defined by more than financial success. For Don, it was a confluence of factors, from the long hours to insurance issues that pushed him into finding a more
personally rewarding occupation, and for Todd, it was the disconnect between his philosophical ideas and those of his clients that led him to search for a more satisfying and personally fulfilling job. And while teaching was not their original professional aspiration, all three of these participants stated that they currently find themselves in an occupation that they enjoy and that allows them to feel complete professionally.

Whereas each participant in the study described negative experiences and frustrations with teaching, none of the participants in this study would be classified as Crow et al.’s (1990) “unconverted,” since each plans to remain in education as long as they continue to be members of the workforce.

Serow. The divisions between Serow’s (1993) four categories are not as clearly defined as those of Crow et al. (1990), and several of the participants in this study fit into more than one category. For example, both Jennifer and Cindy could be classified as “rectifiers” as both left their first profession to correct the mistake of not becoming a teacher as a first career. The assignment to this category could be questionable, however, because neither rejected teaching because of parents or peers as Serow defined it in his study, but rather they chose not to teach for personal reasons. For Jennifer it was the perceived low salary of teachers that kept her from becoming a teacher, and for Cindy it was the lack of confidence in her own abilities to control and instruct a group of children.

With regard to Serow’s (1993) other categories, Don could be categorized as “practical,” since he stated that two of the reasons why he chose teaching as a career were the time he could spend with his family and the opportunity to coach. All seven of the participants could be categorized as “practical” with regard to staying in the teaching
profession, as each mentioned either the benefits of the schedule or the comfort of the job security as reasons why they will continue to teach. Three of the four secondary teachers, Jennifer, Cindy, and Todd, could be classified as “subject-oriented.” They all described a passion for English literature as a reason why they chose the teaching profession. And finally, all seven participants in the study could fit into what Serow called the “extender” category because every one had some type of successful prior experience with teaching which either piqued or confirmed his or her interest in the teaching profession.

**Priyadharshini and Robinson-Pant.** With regard to Priyadharshini and Robinson-Pant’s (2003) six categories of second career teachers, five of the participants in this study would fall into the “successful careerist” category. This category is defined by those second career teachers coming from successful careers in business or industry. They chose teaching because they felt they had achieved their goals in their first career or had discovered that the nature of their career had changed drastically over the years. They were looking for a new direction, fully realizing they would have a drop in professional status and salary. Don, Jeff, and Craig each came from a career which had drained them mentally and physically with the number of hours and demands by coworkers and/or clients. Jennifer was unchallenged and bored with her first profession of journalism, and Todd had become disenchanted and frustrated with the expectations of the parishioners he was trying to serve. For each of these participants, the drop in salary and status was worth the anticipated professional and personal satisfaction that they hoped to gain from the career shift to teaching.
Two other categories from Priyadharshini and Robinson-Pant’s (2003) classification model were found in this study. Linda would fall into the “serial careerist” category. Even though her first career was in fashion merchandising where she worked for five years, she also worked a string of jobs from retail to secretarial work to independent marking from her home during the time she was getting married and taking care of her young children. Now that she is teaching, she finds comfort in the long-term security and benefits of her new profession. Cindy, on the other hand, would fall into the “parent” category as named by Priyadharshini and Robinson-Pant. Cindy stated that while she was working as a paralegal, she saw many women leave the law firm indefinitely as they began to have children because it simply was not a family-friendly career. As she started to plan a family of her own, Cindy looked for a profession that would allow her to work and still be a dominant part of her family’s daily life. She found that balance in teaching.

As discussed above, the participants in this study can be classified according to the current research regarding motivations for choosing the teaching profession. Likewise, the research regarding challenges that second career teachers face in the classroom support the findings in this study. These challenges are described in the following section.

**Challenges in teaching.** Similar to those second career teachers in Freidus’ and Krasnow’s (1991) study who “view[ed] their decision to become teachers as a positive career choice” (p. 19), all of the participants in this study perceived that they made the right decision to become classroom teachers. Just as in previous research on second
career teachers (Freidus & Krasnow, 1991; Powers, 2002), in this study the perceptions of student success and of making a positive impact on students’ lives are a source of self-satisfaction for second career teachers and a confirmation of their success as teachers. In addition, the second career teachers in both Powers’ and Freidus and Krasnow’s studies stated that they found teaching to be the most enjoyable job they have ever had, but all at once much harder than expected and at times disappointing. “They were disappointed when they recognized the nature of their new career world” (Freidus & Krasnow, 1991, p. 23). The same was true for the participants in this study. This disappointment did not encourage the participants in any of the studies to leave the profession, however, but rather to realign their goals with a more realistic vision of how they might have a positive influence on their students and on society as a whole.

Problems with administration. Difficulty with administrators is a theme in both this study and those studies of other researchers. The secondary level teachers in this study perceived their relationship with their administrators, especially those in their buildings, as turbulent. This perception was found in several other studies as well (Powers, 2002; Resta, Huling, & Rainwater, 2001; Weasmer, 2002). Powers found in his study that “the perceptions by the second career teachers of their administrators were not overly favorable” (p. 314). They did not believe that the administrators in their buildings had effective leadership capabilities and the teachers “learned not to rely on administrators for support, accolades, and caring” (p. 315). According to Resta et al. (2001), “Administrators who want a docile teacher who won’t make waves many not be prepared for the assertive, resourceful, and vocal second career teacher” (p. 62).
sentiment is consistent with the teachers in this study who stated that at the beginning of their teaching career they felt appreciated and welcomed because they were someone with a different perspective on education. Currently, however, they perceive that they are viewed by administrators as disruptive and troublesome. They now avoid their administration as much as possible by staying in their classrooms and out of the administrative spotlight.

**Lack of student motivation.** Lack of student motivation was another commonality that emerged in this study among the perceptions of the secondary level teachers with regard to the challenges they face in the classroom. Once again, Powers (2002) noted the same theme in his research. “The participants’ greatest perceived challenge in their new career of teaching centered on the lack of student motivation and discipline” (p. 310). This challenge may have resulted as both Jennifer and Todd suggested, from the fact that many of the second career teachers’ own experiences as students did not include student difficulties of this nature. In addition, the extended time between their own experiences as students and their current lives as teachers has been influenced by their individual life paths as well as media sources and society’s portrayal of teaching and education in general. The realities of teaching that these teachers encounter upon entering a classroom many years after their own schooling often become a source of disappointment and frustration.

Despite the challenges that second career teachers both in this study and in previous research face in their new profession, studies have indicated that overall this subgroup of teachers has a deep commitment to their new job and responsibilities as
educators. This commitment as researched in the past and as supported in this study is discussed in the following section.

**Commitment to teaching.** Powers (2002) noted that the participants in his study, despite the challenges and disappointments they found in their new profession, were “highly committed to the path they [had] chosen [as teachers]” (p. 304). This theme of commitment to the teaching profession is a common one among researchers investigating second career teachers (Chambers, 2002; Freidus & Krasnow, 1991; Novak & Knowles, 1992; Powers 2002) and in this study as well. As Freidus (1992) acknowledged, “They become teachers by choice not by default. They have tried and succeeded at careers in other fields . . . Second career teachers have made conscious decisions that teaching is the career they want” (p. 3). In this study, this commitment to teaching is shown by the participants’ determination to stay in the classroom amidst their frustrations with both the administrators and issues regarding specific groups of students. It is also demonstrated by all seven participants’ resistance to leaving the classroom in search of a career in administration. They stated that they chose teaching because they wanted to work with students and make a difference in their lives. They did not wish to pursue a career in education that would result in a focus on career status and a pursuit of higher salaries. According to Powers, “the trade-off for lower pay is the increased personal satisfaction gained by teaching and providing a service” (p. 304). The teachers in this study expressed this same sentiment.

Whereas several of the findings that emerged from this study are consistent with what other researchers have discovered over the last two decades through their own
investigations on second career teachers, a number of findings in this study need further exploration, some already touched upon in the current literature, and some unique to this study. The next section of this chapter describes those findings.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The final section of this chapter discusses recommendations for future research pertaining to second career teachers. These recommendations stem from the four major themes that emerged from the data in this study. As previously discussed, within those four themes a number of the commonalities are supported by previous research studies and several are unique to this area of research. All of them need further investigation as a more complete understanding of second career teachers can only benefit their opportunities for success in their new profession. Moreover, throughout the course of this study, a number of questions emerged that I believe are worth additional study as a means to even further develop the literature on second career teachers and their experiences as classroom teachers.

**Motivations for Becoming a Second Career Teacher**

Although over the last 20 years many researchers have focused on why people who change careers choose to become teachers, the need for additional research continues in this area as long as teacher educators strive to create preparation programs that support and train career changers for teaching. Understanding the motivations and backgrounds of their pre-service second career teachers will help teacher education programs provide them with adequate opportunity and support for a successful transition from their first careers to classroom teaching (Chin & Young, 2007; Tichelaar et al.,
2008). “If we want to promote retention and professionalism in graduates of ACPs [alternative certification programmes], there is a need to know more about career changers’ backgrounds and about how these programmes equip them to become teachers” (Tigchelaar et al., p. 1531). This sentiment is echoed by career theorists who “tell us that development of competence and the restructuring of identity are critical tasks for individuals engaged in career transition” (Jorissen, 2003, p. 43). Although this was not a dominant area of interest for this study, several of the participants stated that even though they perceive that they use specific skills from their first career now as current teachers, the possible connection and transfer of skills from their first career to teaching was not explicitly explored as part of their teacher preparation. The participants in this study felt that their teacher preparation, especially because of its short duration, focused more exclusively on the particulars to surviving as a classroom teacher, rather than on how they individually could become skillful teachers. Many stated that except for the first day introductions, their first career was not utilized and rather quickly forgotten by both their professors and their peers. With further research in this area, however, teacher preparation and school mentor programs will be able to find improved ways of preparing and supporting career changers not only as they complete their teacher preparation, but as they struggle through the first few induction years in the classroom. This support may then lead to a higher longevity in the teaching profession as a whole.

A theme unique to this study that I believe should be further investigated by researchers interested in second career teachers is the timeline related to when a career changer chooses to leave his or her first profession and when he or she decides to enroll
in a teacher preparation program. Understanding this process is an additional part of understanding the motivation behind choosing teaching as a second career. In this study, I was surprised to find that the majority of the participants chose to enter the teaching profession after having left their first career for quite some time. In other words, most of them did not leave their first job with the specific intent to become teachers. They left as a result of a variety of factors, and later, through a series of circumstances they decided that teaching was the profession they wished to pursue. Understanding the experience of making the decision to become a second career teacher would be beneficial to those teacher educators who create the programs designed to prepare these teachers for working with their future students and for both administrators and mentors who support second career teachers in their transition into their own classrooms because it would allow them to create programs and support systems that meet these teachers’ specific needs for their preparation and transition into teaching.

**Relationship of Second Career Teachers and Administrators**

Whereas several researchers have noted that second career teachers, once in the classroom, often find themselves in conflict with the administration at all levels of education, from the building principal, to state board of education, still more research is needed in this area. As discussed earlier, both previous research and this study have shown that second career teachers typically enter the profession with a sense of mission, but often, their altruistic intentions are frustrated by the harsh realities and bureaucracy that surround schools and educational policy. Those career changers coming from business and industry, often believing that they are leaving politics behind, are especially
aggravated when they find that at times the situation in schools is even worse than from where they were coming. Understanding the frustrations and challenges of second career teachers can be beneficial for those teacher educators, mentors, and administrators who work to prepare and support them on a daily basis.

**Comparison of Secondary Level and Elementary Level Second Career Teachers**

As described in Chapter 2, educational literature is replete with studies that focus on the comparison between first career and second career teachers in regard to both their preparation and their induction into the teaching profession, yet little research has been conducted on the distinctions that exist within the second career teacher subgroup.

In this study both commonalities and differences were noted in the perceptions that the secondary level and the elementary level teachers had with regard to their administration, their students, and their overall perception of their role as the teacher. The elementary level teachers stated that they were surprised with the vastness of their job and the social and moral responsibilities that they felt they had as teachers, responsibilities that go beyond the teaching of the academic subjects. The secondary level teachers perceived themselves in constant conflict with administrators and with students who struggle with self-discipline and motivation. While none of these challenges have caused the teachers in this specific study to leave the profession, this topic needs further investigation. The differences and commonalities between these groups of second career teachers can once again help teacher educators and administrators in understanding the experiences that career changers have as they leave their first profession and prepare to become teachers. With a better understanding of
these teachers, universities will be able to create improved teacher education programs, and administrators will be better able to support the growing number of second career teachers on their faculty.

Retention Rate of Second Career Teachers and the Role of Gender

As the number of second career teachers continues to grow in this country, continued research on their rates of retention and attrition is needed. The literature on teachers as a whole is full of statistics concerning retention rates and the gender makeup of the teaching force, all with the intent of understanding teachers and keeping the qualified ones in the classroom. I was unable to find these statistics about second career teachers as a group separate from those who choose teaching as their first career. Although all of the participants in my study stated that they perceived they are now in the right profession and plan to stay in teaching, I question the retention rates of second career teachers as a whole. It is well stated in educational literature that approximately 50% of teachers leave before their fifth year of teaching (Ingersoll, 2001). I would like to know if this is also true with second career teachers. Or is their commitment to the profession a significant enough factor to lower the rate of departure for their subgroup of teachers? If so, what influences this commitment? Are the seven teachers in my study the exception or the norm in this area? Further research is needed as it may enable teacher educators, administrators, and school districts to find ways to prepare and support all teachers in such a way that they remain in the profession for a much longer time.

I also found it surprising in my study that the majority of my participants were men, whereas the teaching force in general is typically dominated by women. In fact, at
the beginning of my study I began with four elementary teachers and four secondary teachers. Of the eight participants in all, five were men. Three of the four elementary teachers were men. This was surprising to me especially in the primary level as many elementary faculties have only one or two men in the entire building. It leads me to ask the question about the gender makeup of all second career teachers and the impact that it has on their teacher preparation and their success in schools. I believe more research is needed in this area. Once again, are the participants in my study the exception or the norm?

**The Impact of Second Career Teachers on Student Success**

All seven of the participants in my study plan to remain in the teaching profession, and they plan to do so primarily due to the perception that they are successful teachers. As described in Chapter 4, they base this perception of success on the success of their students both academically and personally. This is another area of research that is in need of further investigation. What are the factors that influence their success in the classroom? How do these factors then influence student success? Since a major goal of education and of educational research is to improve student success and achievement, whether academically, socially, or personally, understanding the factors that influence the success of these teachers and of their students will benefit schools in the future.

**Second Career Teachers Who Have Left the Teaching Profession**

All of the participants in this study perceive themselves as successful teachers and plan to remain in education, but what about those who have moved on from the teaching profession? While the research on second career teachers who continue to teach is a
valuable addition to educational research and will enable university programs and district administrators to support and mentor these teachers throughout their tenure in schools, it would also be extremely valuable to know more about those second career teachers who have chosen to leave teaching. Where do they go when they leave the teaching profession? What do they perceive as the factors that caused their exit? What do they believe could have encouraged and enabled them to remain teaching? Understanding why these teachers could not find success or satisfaction in their teaching would be valuable to both programs and schools as they continually strive to find ways to support and nurture good teachers.

**Use of the Critical Incident Log in Educational Research**

As described in Chapter 3, critical incident analysis is an adapted form of the critical incident technique developed by Flanagan (1954, 1982) in his attempt to capture the complexity of one’s job behavior in terms of the social context in which the job took place. In this study, critical incident analysis required that the participants keep a written log of and later describe events or conversations which occurred not only in their classrooms but also in their daily interactions with peers or other society members that either confirmed or conflicted with their decision to become a teacher.

In this study, this log was used not as a source of data, but rather as a means to enhance the descriptions the participants gave about their best and worst experiences as teachers. It was instrumental in providing rich detail about real events that had taken place during the time of the study. Although the participants received some instruction about what to record in the log, I did not give them requirements about how often to write
or about the length of their descriptions. Some of the participants wrote daily, others did not. Some of the participants wrote detailed narratives, others made lists. Overall, the log worked well as a means of enriching each participant’s interviews, yet was not as cumbersome as the task of keeping a journal.

When asked to keep a critical incident log, the participants in this study accepted and completed the task without reservation. Often it is difficult for researchers to find participants who are willing to keep detailed journals. The log used in this study was readily accepted by the participants because they had the freedom to write as often or as infrequently as they wished and as much or as little as time allotted. Interestingly, though, the majority of the participants wrote often, some every day, and with a large amount of detail. The logs served as an excellent source of discussion during the interviews as the participants described both positive and negative experiences in their teaching. They provided a source of concrete detail as opposed to a reliance on memory alone. As researchers continue to look for ways to support their data, other uses of this type of log or an adapted form of this log may be useful.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of career choice of second career teachers currently in at least their fifth year of work in the classroom and the factors that influence these perceptions. The number of second career teachers in this country has grown substantially over the last 20 years. In response, educational researchers have studied them as a means to explore their preparation programs, as well as their motivations, benefits, and challenges as new teachers. Additionally, researchers
have tried to define second career teachers in comparison to traditional first career teachers as a means to provide better preparation and support programs for their transition into teaching as a profession.

This study went beyond the existing research on second career teachers by investigating their perceptions of their choice of profession years after their preparation and induction programs were complete. The results of this study indicated that all the participants perceive themselves as successful teachers and plan to remain in education for the remainder of their tenure in the workforce. They perceive that choosing teaching as their second career was the right decision. In addition, several commonalities and differences were identified between the subgroups of the elementary level and secondary level teachers with regard to their perceptions of their role as a classroom teacher and the challenges they face in their daily job.

Whereas this study added to the literature on second career teachers, more such research is needed. With a complete understanding of second career teachers, universities and individual teacher preparation programs can more fully prepare these teachers for a career in the classroom, and school administrators and mentors can better assist them in their transition and continued success in their schools.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL
June 10, 2009

Rebecca Wiehe
Curriculum and Instruction

Re: #88-526: “Perceptions of second-career teachers of their choice of profession”

Dear Ms. Wiehe,

The Kent State University Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved your Annual Review and Progress Report for continuing review purposes. It is understood that the research is continuing without changes. Protocol approval has been extended and is effective June 9, 2009 through May 29, 2010.

Federal regulations and Kent State University IRB policy requires that research be reviewed at intervals appropriate to the degree of risk, but not less than once per year. The IRB has determined that this protocol requires an annual review and progress report. The IRB will forward an annual review reminder notice to you by email as a courtesy. Please note that it is the responsibility of the principal investigator to be aware of the study expiration date and submit the required materials. Please submit review materials (annual review form and copy of current consent form) one month prior to the expiration date.

DHHS regulations and Kent State University Institutional Review Board guidelines require that any changes in research methodology, protocol design, or principal investigator have the prior approval of the IRB before implementation and continuation of the protocol. The IRB must also be informed of any adverse events associated with the study. The IRB further requests a final report at the conclusion of the study.

Kent State University has a Federal Wide Assurance on file with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP): FWA Number 00001853.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at 330-672-2704 or tfrederick@kent.edu

Sincerely,

Tonya Frederic
K.N., B.S.N.
Research Compliance Administrator

Cc: Richard P. Ambrose, Ph.D.
APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM: PERCEPTIONS OF SECOND CAREER TEACHERS

ON THEIR CHOICE OF PROFESSIONS
Consent Form: Second Career Teachers’ Perceptions of Their Profession

I want to conduct research on the perceptions that second career teachers have of their choice to work in education. I am hoping to inform educational research with respect to how to better prepare and assist second career educators as they enter schools and work with students. I would like you to take part in this project. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to be interviewed by me on three separate occasions. The interviews will be audio taped so that I can transcribe them; then the audiotapes will be erased or destroyed.

There are no risks involved in this study beyond those encountered in everyday life, and I will protect your anonymity, as pseudonyms will be used in any writing or discussion about my research. Confidentiality will be maintained to the limits of the law.

Taking part in this project is entirely up to you, and no one will hold it against you if you decide not to participate. If you do take part, you may stop at any time without penalty.

If you would like to know more about this research study, please contact me at rwiehe@kent.edu or my advisor, Richard Ambrose, at rambrose@kent.edu. The project has been approved by Kent State University. If you have questions about Kent State University’s rules for research, please call Dr. Peter C. Tandy, Acting Vice President and Dean, Division of Research and Graduate Studies (Tel. 330.672.2704).

You will get a copy of this consent form.

Sincerely,
Rebecca Wiehe

I agree to take part in this project. I know what I will have to do and that I can stop at any time, without penalty.

__________________________________________  ___________________
Signature                                                                                      Date
APPENDIX C

AUDIOTAPE CONSENT FORM: SECOND CAREER TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR PROFESSION
Audiotape Consent Form: Second Career Teachers’ Perceptions of Their Profession

I agree to audiotaping at ________________________________ on __________________________. 

_________________________________     ___________________ 
Signature                                                                                       Date

I have been told that I have the right to hear the audio tapes before they are used. I have decided that I:

_____ want to hear the tapes                       ____ do not want to hear the tapes

Sign now if you do not want to hear the tapes. If you want to hear the tapes, you will be asked to sign after hearing them.

_________________________________     ___________________ 
Signature                                                                                     Date

_____________________________________________________________________
Address
APPENDIX D

CRITICAL INCIDENT LOG INSTRUCTIONS
Perceptions of Second Career Teachers on Their Choice of Profession

- Critical Incident Journal

- Suggested timeline: August 25th – October 10th

- Record any event/comment/interaction that causes you to think about your decision to be a teacher (in a positive or negative way)

- We will use this journal/list as a source of conversation in our second and/or third interview(s).
REFERENCES
REFERENCES


Erickson, F. (1986). Qualitative methods in research on teaching. In M. Wittrock (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teaching* (pp. 119-161). New York: Macmillan.


