

Understanding the Lived Experiences of Second Career Beginning Teachers

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I dedicate this thesis to God

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Certificate of originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Student _____

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Abstract

The past twenty years have seen a steady increase in the number of mature aged individuals entering the teaching profession as a second career (McKenzie, Rowley, Weldon, & Murphy, 2011). To expand the potential pool of well-qualified teachers, opening the profession to individuals with relevant experience outside education is now recognised as an important policy option (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2011). Career change teachers are seen to bring with them a “variety of skills, including management or organisational expertise” (Priyadharshini & Robinson-Pant, 2003, p. 95). They are also increasingly relied on to bolster the teaching cadre in countries facing teacher shortages. In spite of their increasing presence in the teaching profession, little research has been conducted on career change teachers. Compared to the large number of studies of first career beginning teachers, research on second career teachers and their school experiences are few and far between. In particular, the literature rarely publishes the voices of second career classroom teachers after they have begun their teaching journey, tending to rather focus on second career student teachers instead.

This qualitative study uses both an interpretive and a phenomenological approach to explore the school experiences of seven second career beginning teachers from schools in the state of New South Wales, Australia. The purpose is to investigate what it is like to be a second career teacher after having been elsewhere and to understand the ways in which the participants’ past career and life experiences influence their current roles as school teachers.

Participants’ individual accounts are represented through thematic analysis, woven around the existential themes of lived relation and lived space. The study found that all the participants shared a deep passion for teaching and most had made a conscious and thoughtful decision to become a teacher. Teacher participants were keen to share their prior work and life experiences with students and believed they brought valuable perspectives to school and classrooms. Career change teacher participants had to make significant adjustments to fit into their new work environments and to adapt to school culture in general.

This dissertation leads to a better understanding of the career transition process of second career teacher participants. The contributions of career change school teachers, particularly with respect to student learning and development is also highlighted. By increasing awareness and understanding of second career teachers and their contributions to the teaching profession, the study will benefit the teaching community, including senior school management who employ second career teachers in their schools. ■