

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: *Joining School Communities of Practice: Career Changer Teacher Identity Transitions*

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As the number of career changers who enter the teaching profession increases, it is important to understand the experiences that assist these new teachers in acculturating to the new profession and to know what contributes to their retention in it. This mixed method study examined the three characteristics of a community of practice - mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire - to discover what experiences were related to career changers becoming part of the teaching community of practice. Additionally, it investigated the relationship among acculturation into a school community and the experiences career changers have that assist them in identifying as teachers and remaining in the profession.

Career changers reported that the most important consideration in identifying as a teacher is the relationship with the students. Positive student interactions lead to satisfaction with one's position as a teacher. Numerous comments by career changers emphasized that negative experiences in the school community might force one to leave the school, but negative experiences and relationships with the students would cause one to leave the profession of teaching.

The results also indicated that multiple personal, preparation program, and early teaching experiences contribute to mutual engagement in the school community. These experiences include feeling comfortable talking to and making friends with other teachers. Even more important to developing identity as a teacher are joint enterprise and shared repertoire experiences. Joint enterprise experiences include using prior skills, contributing to faculty discussions, and having one's opinions taken seriously while shared repertoire experiences involve knowing routines and sharing teacher stories. Career changers in this research project had fewer joint enterprise and shared repertoire experiences than mutual engagement experiences although both of the former have a stronger association with identity as a teacher. Importantly, identifying as a teacher was associated with retention in the teaching profession. Providing the experiences these career changers need to identify as teachers will assist career changers in transitioning into teaching and remaining in the profession.