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SECOND CAREER TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR PROFESSION (191 pp.)

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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.

