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Teacher dropouts may be reduced by studying teacher career development.

Why educators should consider teacher career development

by Paul Burden

Administrators, supervisors, school board members, legislators and the voting public make decisions about supervisory practices, staff development programs, funding and other support services that affect teachers. By recognizing the characteristics of teacher career development, these decision-makers can help reduce the number of teacher dropouts, help meet teachers' needs at different career stages and promote further teacher development.

A brief review of teacher career development is provided here along with a discussion of reasons why educators should consider teacher career development.

Research on teacher career development

A growing body of research indicates that teachers have different job skills, knowledge, behaviors, attitudes and concerns at different points in their careers (e.g. Burden, 1970, 1980; Fuller, 1969, 1970; Fuller and Bown, 1975; Newman, 1978; Peterson, 1978), and that these changes occur in a regular developmental pattern. These studies provide evidence for stages in teachers' career development.

Teacher career development deals with changes teachers experience throughout their careers in: (1) **job skills, knowledge and behaviors**—in areas such as teaching methods, discipline strategies, curriculum, planning, rules and procedures; (2) **attitudes and outlooks**—in areas such as images of teaching, professional confidence and maturity, willingness to try new teaching methods, satisfactions, concerns, values, and beliefs; and (3) **job events**—in areas such as changes in grade level, school, or district; involvement in additional professional responsibilities; and age of entry and retirement.

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Fuller and Bown (1975) identified four stages of concerns in the process of becoming a teacher after reviewing research by Fuller and others: (1) preteaching concerns, (2) early concerns about self, (3) teaching situation concerns, and (4) concerns about pupils. Fuller (1969, 1970) proposed three phases of teacher development. The three phases of concerns were with: (1) self, (2) self as teacher, and (3) pupils. Details about job events, attitudes, and knowledge gains in these reports were sparse. Aspects of job mobility have been described by Burden (1983).

Evidence for three stages of development in the early part of a teaching career was reported by Burden (1979, 1980) from an interview of experienced teachers. Details concerning research design, methodology and findings can be found in these earlier reports. Briefly stated, stage I, a **survival stage**, occurred during the first year of teaching. The teachers reported their limited knowledge of teaching activities and environment; they were subject-centered and felt they had little professional insight; they lacked confidence and were unwilling to try new methods; they found themselves conforming to their preconceived image of "teacher."

Stage II, an **adjustment stage**, occurred for these teachers in the second through fourth years. The teachers reported that during this period they were learning a great deal about planning and organization, about children, curriculum and methods. They gradually gained confidence in themselves and began to discover that students are people.

Stage III, the **mature stage**, was comprised of the fifth and subsequent years of teaching. Teachers in this stage felt they had a good command of teaching activities and the environment. They were more child-centered, felt confident and secure, and were willing to try new teaching methods. They found they had gradually abandoned their image of "teacher," had gained professional insight and felt they could handle most new situations that might arise.

Newman (1978) obtained middle-aged experienced teachers' perceptions of their career development in an interview study and identified stages of career development for each decade of the teaching career reflecting changes in attitudes, satisfactions, mobility and professional behaviors. Three attitudinal phases of teacher career development were reported in a study of 50 retired teachers conducted by Peterson (1978). Other research studies which have examined only part of teachers' careers (e.g. only the first year or the first few years) seem to confirm the stages of teacher career development reported in all the above studies.

Implications for educators

By recognizing the characteristics of teacher career development, practitioners, teacher educators and researchers can help achieve the objectives which are discussed below.

(1) Reduce the dropout rate in the early years

Survival rates for teachers reported in several available studies have not been consistent. In a recent study, Mark and Anderson (1978) reported that in 1972 the survival rate after four years of teaching was about 60 percent, up considerably over the 30 percent in a 1960 Oregon study that they reviewed.

Even after four years of college training, including student teaching, many teachers begin their first year not knowing whether teaching is the best career choice for them. This uncertainty is consistent with Super's (1975) description of the exploratory stage of career development. Teacher educators could include information about teacher career development and the teaching career in the preservice teacher education program. With this fuller view of the teaching career, some preservice teachers might conclude that teaching wasn't what they were expecting and switch majors to explore other careers before finishing their teacher education programs. Thus, having information about teacher career development available for students in the preservice program may help some individuals select themselves out of teaching. Those who continue in the teacher education program would presumably be more certain, by comparison, of their career selection and would have more commitment. The dropout rate in the early years of service would likely be lower.

Administrators, supervisors and staff developers also could help reduce the dropout rate in the first few years with an understanding of the characteristics of teacher career development. With a recognition of the unique needs and concerns of teachers in the early years of service, better assistance could be provided. It is likely that the dropout rate would be lower if these teachers could get the help they need during their early years. Fortunately, there has been increasing interest in meeting the needs of teachers during induction, typically defined to include the first three years of teaching following the completion of the preservice program (Hall, 1982a). Recent reviews provide more information on induction (Elias, Fisher & Simon, 1980; Johnston, 1981; Hall, 1982b).

(2) Meet teacher needs at different stages in their careers

From the data available on teacher career development, it is clear that teachers have different skills and needs at different points in their careers. By knowing the characteristics of teacher career development and the influences on development, supervisors and administrators can respond to teachers' needs at different stages. After examining teacher development research studies, Glickman (1980, 1981) suggested developmental supervision as an alternative practice for helping teachers at various points in their careers.

Teacher stress and teacher burnout have received considerable attention recently. Factors relating to teacher career development provide insight into stress teachers may experience at different points in their careers. Furthermore, with an understanding of teacher career development, more appropriate assistance may be provided to meet teachers' needs at different points in their careers, thus reducing teacher stress and increasing teacher vitality. For each career stage, Burden (1982) suggested that supervisors provide different types of assistance and use different supervisory approaches in an effort to meet the teachers' needs and reduce stress at these stages.

(3) Facilitate further development

Hunt and associates (1971) demonstrated that teachers at more advanced developmental stages were viewed as more effective classroom teachers in several ways. Burden's (1979, 1980) work suggests that there are sequential, cumulative and hierarchical changes throughout the teach-

ing career. Research on teacher effectiveness suggests that teachers at higher developmental and conceptual levels may be more flexible, more stress-tolerant and more adaptive in professional functioning than teachers at lower conceptual levels (Hunt and Joyce, 1967; Murphy and Brown, 1970; Kohlberg, 1969).

If more advanced stages result in more effective instruction, as some of these studies suggest, supervisors and administrators should facilitate development to these advanced stages. Teachers' understandings and interpretations of their own development can be a positive influence on their further development. To achieve that objective during inservice programs, Newman, Burden, and Applegate (1980) suggested a number of specific ways teachers could examine their long range career development.

(4) Build a data base for a theory of teacher career development

When practitioners, teacher educators and researchers examine teacher career development, they may recognize some deficiencies in the available data and may be interested in conducting additional research to add to the data base. Research in this area is in a state of infancy and additional research would help define and clarify developmental characteristics and influences, and thus help achieve the objectives discussed above.

With more data, a theory of teacher career development could be proposed which would provide a conceptual framework for developmental influences and characteristics. Others have called for the development of this theory (Getzels and Jackson, 1964; Schutes, 1975; Ryan, 1979; McNergney and Crook, 1980; Sprinthall, 1980; and Sprinthall and Theis-Sprinthall, 1980). In a review of teacher education, Schalock (1980) focused on the absent research and discussed the value of data in theory development.

Conclusion

Administrators, supervisors and school board members can help reduce the number of teacher dropouts, help meet teachers' needs, and promote further teacher development when they recognize the characteristics of teacher career development. Decisions by these people concerning supervisory practices, staff development programs, funding, and resource services could be supportive of teachers who have different skills and needs at different points in their careers.

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