TRANSITIONING FIRST-CAREER SKILLS INTO A SECOND CAREER IN TEACHING:
A COLLECTIVE CASE STUDY OF EFFECTIVE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

by
Timothy Joshua Simmons
Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative collective case study was to understand how first-career skills were utilized by highly effective second-career elementary school teachers in northeast Tennessee. The guiding research question for the study was: How do the skills acquired in a first career affect second-career elementary school teachers? The theories that guided this study were experiential learning theory developed by David Kolb and transformative learning theory developed by Jack Mezirow as they focus on the importance of experience and perspective in the learning process. The sample for this study was comprised of five second-career elementary school teachers, four elementary school principals, and four district academic coaches in a northeast Tennessee school district. Participant interviews and a focus group served as the primary means of data collection. The analysis of documents, including reflective journals and lesson plans from teacher participants also provided data for the study. Collected data was analyzed within and across cases using open and axial coding. A central theme emerged from the data along with several sub-themes. The central theme focused on the impact that soft professional skills developed in a first career had on the effectiveness of second-career elementary school teachers. Sub-themes that emerged included (a) relationship building skills, (b) organization skills, (c) presentation skills, (d) eagerness to adapt, and (e) content connections. Recommendations for future research included exploring the effects of first-career skills from different professions than the ones used in the study, studying multiple participants from similar careers, and conducting a longitudinal study to track how first-career skills are utilized over time.

Keywords: second-career teacher, career change, elementary teacher, effective teacher
Dedication

I dedicate this work to Natalie, my loving wife who was always there to provide encouragement and motivation throughout this process. I cannot count the times that you have shouldered the majority of the parenting responsibilities in our home so I could focus on completing my program. At times, you must have felt like a single parent, but you never expressed any frustration with me over the past few years as I worked toward achieving a personal and professional goal. You have been my rock, and I love you.

To my sons, Jackson and Cameron, I am so thankful for the two of you. Just like your mother, you have also sacrificed a tremendous amount. At times, it must have seemed that I was present in body only as my mind constantly revolved around this program. I appreciate your understanding and willingness to share your dad during some of the most important years of your lives. I love you both.

My parents and brother have also provided a tremendous amount of encouragement and guidance throughout my educational journeys. My parents have taught me the value of hard work, which has served me well as a professional and as a graduate student. Seeing their work ethics first-hand have been nothing short of inspiring. I would not be where I am today without my brother and best friend, Jordan, who has always been there for me to provide encouragement and perspective throughout my life.
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I thank God for surrounding me with so many wonderful people throughout my life. The influence that my family, friends, teachers, and coaches have had on me is immeasurable. I have been blessed to have countless teachers and coaches who have inspired me, most notably Keith Turner and Jeff Moorhouse. Coach Turner saw something in me before I ever saw it in myself. His encouragement and investment in me has impacted me more than he will ever know. Coach Moorhouse taught me what life’s priorities should be: faith in God, love of family, education, and then athletics. Lots of coaches preach this, but he is the greatest example of living this way.

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List of Abbreviations

Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT)
Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM)
Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP)
Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM)
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Chapter 1 first provides the background for the study, which includes findings from previous studies related to the topic of second-career teachers. The problem statement and purpose statement that support the need and direction of this study are also included. A discussion of the significance of the study based upon previous literature is found in Chapter 1 as well. The research questions that were used in this study are also discussed in this chapter along with a brief description of the research plan. Delimitations and limitations, along with a list of definitions pertinent to the study, are found at the end of this chapter.

Background

Concerns about the shortage and quality of teachers have led many school districts to recruit professionals from other careers to the realm of education (Williams & Forgasz, 2009). This has contributed to an increase in the number of nontraditional pathways into the teaching profession as more people choose teaching as a second career (Tigchelaar, Brouwer, & Vermunt, 2010). Second-career teachers can bring a vast amount of experience and skills from their first career to the teaching profession. While many of these skills can be effectively integrated into teaching, some prove to be useless, or even detrimental, in the transition to a teaching career (Tan, 2012). This study focuses on how first-career skills and experiences have influenced five highly effective second-career elementary teachers.

Educational initiatives focusing on student achievement have required school systems to address teacher quality (Looney, 2011). This has led to significant changes in teacher education programs and professional development in response to the need for first-rate teachers. The use of formal and informal learning opportunities for current and future teachers has also been used
to improve instructional practice (Parise & Spillan, 2010) as well as to recruit people from other careers. This has added a new dimension to the teacher workforce, as job change has become more common among workers, which is in stark contrast to the traditional view of career as an unchanging, one-time decision (Carless & Arnup, 2011). As more people look to change careers, nontraditional pathways into teaching have increased, making this professional field more accessible for prospective educators (Tigchelaar et al., 2010).

There are several factors that lead professionals to make a career change to teaching. Bruinsma and Jansen (2010) discussed the influence of intrinsic motivational factors on the decision to choose teaching as a second career, such as the opportunity to educate children and make a positive impact on the lives of others. Another factor cited by Wilcox and Samaras (2009) involved the desire of workers to transition into a career that would be unlike a previous job and provide a more challenging, yet rewarding, environment. This study also attributed the career switch to teaching as something more dynamic. Second-career teachers in their study reported several extrinsic factors that were responsible for their career switch. For some, major restructuring and changes at their first career triggered a career switch, while others noted factors such as retirement or family changes as motivators to become teachers. Castro and Bauml (2009) conducted a similar study that explored second-career teachers’ motivations for changing careers to education. They discovered that many second-career teachers were engaged in some sort of teaching previously, albeit not as a K-12 classroom teacher. Participants had served in teaching roles within their former organization, in church-related positions, or as volunteers in after-school programs. These experiences helped draw them into a full-time career in teaching.

The influence of others was also a key motivator to switch to a teaching career. Encouragement from an educator, such as a teacher or principal, precipitated a career switch to
teaching for some (Wilcox & Samaras, 2009). Along the same lines, a study by Taylor and Hallam (2011) noted the impact that the participants’ own teachers had on their decision to enter teaching in the musical realm. Their experience as a learner inspired them to become teachers themselves. In a like fashion, participants also shared that experiencing their own child’s positive experiences with music encouraged them to pursue a career in music education. For others, however, it was their child’s negative experience in music that inspired them to pursue a career in teaching as they felt their encounters could help them shape a more positive experience for other students in the future.

Several reasons exist for recruiting professionals from other careers to join the teaching ranks. A review of the literature by Tigchelaar et al. (2010) found that combining skills from the first career with new teaching experiences positively affected second-career educators’ effectiveness. The ability to transition those skills often played a large part in one’s initial choice to enter the teaching profession. In addition, the link of former career experiences to a new career in teaching was a major factor in second-career teachers’ satisfaction and success as a classroom teacher (Etherington, 2011; Williams, 2010). Having a plethora of experience from a different career allowed second-career teachers to bring expertise from areas outside of education that can improve teaching and learning (Tigchelaar, Vermunt, & Brouwer, 2012).

While the skills and experiences of second-career teachers add a wealth of knowledge to schools, some challenges arise. As Etherington (2009) points out, “Career experienced teachers with rich work histories may well be the most challenging and least understood profile of K-6 teacher for education faculty, practicum supervisors, and school staff” (p. 39). Nontraditional entrants to teaching may carry different experiences, philosophies, and expectations to the classroom than their younger, more traditional counterparts (Etherington; Trent & Gao, 2009).
Their unique backgrounds are not recognized or valued by the traditional programs that often apply a one-size-fits-all approach to teacher education (Williams, 2010).

According to Tan (2012), whose study examined the self-efficacy of second-career teachers during their first year of teaching, difficulties can arise in transitioning from a previous career into teaching, as many participants are unable to effectively apply their first-career skills to their teaching role. This implies that having work experience in a field other than education does not necessarily increase one’s chances of being a successful classroom teacher. Strong content knowledge and skills from a first career could be negated by other qualities that do not positively impact student achievement (Boyd et al., 2011), and second-career teachers may face difficulties applying the vast amount of content knowledge and career experience they possess (Grier & Johnston, 2012). Questions also remain concerning the ability to retain second-career teachers, as studies have shown that many leave teaching within the first few years after their career change (Tigchelaar et al., 2012). A large number of teachers, including second-career teachers, struggle to establish their teacher identity and gain a sense of belonging in the school, often leading to issues with teacher retention (Williams, 2010).

Changes to teacher education programs and professional development practices can better utilize the skills that second-career teachers bring to teaching. Schools should recognize the expertise that second-career teachers possess and help them implement those competencies into teaching practice (Trent & Gao, 2009). For example, Uusimaki’s (2011) study examined how a workshop for mature-aged graduates in education benefited them by creating a community in which their knowledge was appreciated and valued. Drawing from their previous experiences and sharing their expertise with others gave them a sense of belonging.
Second-career teachers and student teachers are often faced with challenging circumstances when it comes to networking with their younger, less mature peers. Both teacher education programs and school systems need to find ways to encourage social interactions among second-career teachers and teacher education students, allowing them to bridge the gap between where they are in their respective lives (Williams, 2010). Uusimaki (2011) also called for teacher education programs to acknowledge the importance of mature graduates’ backgrounds in shaping their teaching and learning. The increase in the number of second-career teachers has made it paramount that educational programs be modified to improve teaching and learning.

**Situation to Self**

As a classroom teacher, one of my top priorities was improving as a teacher so my students would receive the best instruction possible. Now that I have transitioned into school administration, I feel it is my responsibility to ensure that all of the students in the school are receiving high-quality instruction. One way to address this need is to improve teacher education programs and professional development opportunities. Some of the most effective teachers I have worked with actually entered into teaching after working in a previous career. If first-career skills that are deemed effective can be identified, improvements can be made to traditional teacher education programs and professional development by implementing these skills into practice.

This study was guided by an epistemological philosophical assumption. Epistemologies describe beliefs about what one accepts as truth and how knowledge is constructed (Grbich, 2007; Piantanida & Garman, 2009). The epistemological assumption leads one to examine claims about the nature of being as well as what constitutes reality. An
epistemological approach addresses questions such as what do we know, what do we believe to be truth, and what has led us to know and believe these things (Grbich).

Constructivist and interpretive worldviews were utilized as the research took place in the field and focused on the participants’ point of view and experience. Knowledge is developed within certain contexts, and multiple perspectives regarding this knowledge play key roles in this worldview (Patton, 2002). An attempt to understand the participants’ views in the context of their teaching program and first career required an interpretive epistemology to address the practical nature of the experience (Piantanida & Garman, 2009). The constructivist worldview focuses on how people interpret their experiences in certain contexts, and how these interpretations affect their views of reality. People’s experiences in a given context may vary; thus, multiple realities can be assumed (Grbich, 2007).

**Problem Statement**

Teacher shortages have led school districts and teacher education programs to recruit professionals from areas outside of education into teaching. This has led to the establishment of nontraditional pathways for achieving teacher licensure and certification as working professionals look to gain their teaching credentials through fast-track programs that offer flexible class schedules (Mercado, 2011; Tiglechaar et al., 2010; Uusimaki, 2011). As working professionals make the transition into a second career in teaching, they bring a wealth of experience and competencies with them, many of which positively impact their teaching ability (Etherington, 2011). Their expertise in areas outside of teaching can play a significant role in the success of the school, but many schools are either unwilling or unable to provide avenues for second-career teachers to implement these skills fully while forming their teacher identities (Trent & Gao, 2009).
The rich experiences and unique skills of effective second-career teachers need to be studied and implemented into teacher training and professional development practices. This expanding group of teachers could be an asset to their school districts if used properly (Uusimaki, 2011). This is an important issue, because there have been other studies that revealed unsuccessful attempts to integrate second-career teachers’ previous skills and experiences into schools (Boyd et al., 2011; Williams & Forgasz, 2009). Exploring how second-career elementary school teachers successfully integrate their prior skills and experiences into teaching could provide a framework for addressing this issue as well as improve teaching and learning in schools. The problem is that previous research has not examined the impact of second-career teachers at the elementary school level.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative collective case study was to understand how first-career skills were utilized by highly effective second-career elementary school teachers in northeast Tennessee. A highly effective second-career teacher was defined in this study as someone who had earned at least a bachelor’s degree in a non-teaching field, worked full-time in a career other than education, and earned a score of a 4 or 5 on the Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM) teacher effectiveness score. In Tennessee, the teacher effectiveness score is a combination of teacher observation data and standardized test scores, primarily from the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP), which is administered to students in grades 3-8 in the areas of reading/language arts, math, social studies, and science. The test score component reflects both growth scores and achievement scores on these tests. The setting for this study was at four elementary schools and one intermediate school, in a public school system.
in northeast Tennessee and enlisted five second-career teachers, four school principals, and four
district academic coaches.

**Significance of the Study**

The focus on student achievement and educator accountability has experienced a
dramatic rise in recent years. In response to these increased expectations, initiatives to increase
teacher quality have been developed (Looney, 2011). “Identifying classroom practices
associated with more effective teachers and targeting these practices in teacher education and
professional development provide a potential avenue for improving the quality of instruction for
all students” (Grossman, Loeb, Cohen, & Wyckoff, 2013, p. 449). A study conducted by Al-
Shammari (2012) examined the effects of curriculum modifications on the learning outcomes of
teacher education students. Alterations to the curriculum were based upon the needs of the
students, and the results demonstrated a significant increase in the learning outcomes for these
students. In a similar fashion, tailoring teacher education programs to fit the specific needs of
diverse groups could improve the quality of teachers entering the work force.

Teacher shortages have led schools to recruit nontraditional entrants to the teaching
profession, many of whom come from other professions (Tigchelaar et al., 2010). Those
entering teaching as a second career have unique experiences and skills that shape their beliefs
and approaches to teaching and learning. These teachers are specialists in fields other than
education and can bring distinctive skills into teaching if given the opportunity (Tigchelaar et al.,
2012). Identifying how these skills contribute to second-career teachers’ effectiveness could
revamp existing teacher education programs and drastically improve professional development.
Coupling the first-career skills of second-career teachers with new skills gained from classroom
experience and teacher education programs can positively impact teaching (Tigchelaar et al.,
2010). Modifications to both formal and informal learning opportunities have been shown to improve the quality of instruction (Parise & Spillan, 2010).

This study identified areas of strength that second-career teachers acquired during a previous career. The focus was on the skills acquired and developed during the participants’ actual working experience in their first career, but also provided opportunities to reflect on the undergraduate experience and course work from their first career. Identifying and integrating these skills into teacher education and professional development programs can address some of the existing shortcomings in teaching and improve student learning.

This study was driven by two major theories. The first is Kolb’s experiential learning theory, which states that learning is shaped by one’s experience (Kolb, 1984). In relation to this study, one’s experience in a previous career shaped his or her learning, but it is constantly reshaped through new experiences. Second-career teachers’ past experiences, both personal and professional, affect the way they approach their role as teachers. Previous experience combined with new knowledge gained through teacher education programs, professional development, and on-the-job training provide second-career teachers with a rich, diverse set of skills in their teaching role. The second theory this study will include is Mezirow’s transformative learning theory. Mezirow’s theory addresses how one’s perspective and point of view changes through experience. By engaging in reflective practice, autonomous learners can examine situations and make informed decisions (Mezirow, 1997). Second-career teachers are constantly examining things through a different lens as they seek to incorporate previous skills with new learning.

**Research Questions**

This collective case study will be guided by the following research questions:
a. *How do the skills acquired in a first career affect second-career elementary school teachers?* This was the central question. This study sought to identify which skills from a previous profession transitioned into an elementary school classroom and helped second-career teachers be successful. The successful integration of first-career skills into teaching practice yields positive results in the classroom (Tigchelaar et al., 2010) and impacts teacher satisfaction (Etherington, 2011). Second-career teachers bring skills from a first career that can be beneficial to students (Trent & Gao, 2009). Second-career teachers constantly draw upon their skills from a previous career to enhance their practice (Tan, 2012; Trent & Gao). The primary focus in this study was on how these skills impact the teacher’s effectiveness in the classroom.

b. *What skills do participants see as essential to being an effective teacher?*

Second-career teachers bring a vast amount of skills and knowledge from their previous careers. However, not all of these skills may transfer into teaching (Boyd et al., 2011; Williams & Forgasz, 2009). Knowing which skills are considered to be the most influential in teacher effectiveness will be a key part of this study (Grossman et al., 2013).

c. *How are the first-career skills and experiences of second-career teachers utilized within an elementary school setting?*

The diverse experiences of second-career teachers allow them to bring unique perspectives and expertise from fields outside of education to schools (Etherington, 2011; Tigchelaar et al., 2012). The possession of a particular set of skills and competencies is useless unless these skills are actually utilized in the school. While these assorted skills and experiences can prove to be advantageous, schools do not
always capitalize on them (Trent & Gao, 2009). If channeled properly, second-career teachers could be a valuable resource for school districts and individual schools (Uusimaki, 2011). This question sought to address the actual application and utilization of teachers’ first-career skills into the school.

d. *What challenges do second-career teachers face in applying their first-career skills in an elementary school setting?*

One of the goals of this study was to improve teacher quality by addressing the shortcomings in the areas of teacher education and professional development regarding second-career teachers. Etherington (2009) proposed that second-career teachers may be the most perplexing group of teachers in education. As a result, the transition into a teaching career presents many challenges for second-career teachers (Tan, 2012). In order to truly initiate a change, certain challenges need to be conquered. Having an awareness of perceived challenges is expected to aid in this.

**Research Plan**

This qualitative study employed a case study design. The intent of this study was to understand how first-career skills and experiences made second-career teachers effective. Therefore, a collective, or multiple, case study design that examined several individual cases was used to explore the issue (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). This allowed me to study several second-career teachers, accounting for their different first careers and current teaching settings.

Patton (2002) described qualitative research as being emergent in nature as inquiry guides the study. This allows for researcher flexibility even after the data collection process has begun. It is understood that the researcher should explore emergent issues that come about during research. As issues develop, different phases of the research process may change to adequately
study the emerging issues. The participants’ responses may lead the researcher to shift the research in order to best obtain the information being studied (Creswell, 2013).

Purposive sampling was used to select the participants for this study since certain criteria needed to be met in order to provide an understanding of the research problem (Creswell, 2013). Participants had to be second-career teachers with less than 10 years of teaching experience, and I accounted for participants from different first careers, gender, and teaching placement.

Enlistment questionnaires were shared with all third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers at the five possible elementary sites and the intermediate school. The purpose of the questionnaire was to gather background information to identify second-career teachers with a teacher effectiveness score of a 4 or 5 and learn about their first careers. The teacher effectiveness score is used for teacher evaluation purposes as a component of the Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model, also referred to as TEAM (“TEAM-TN,” n.d.). This model was utilized to identify effective second-career elementary school teachers for this study because it is the evaluation tool that is used in the school district where the research is taking place as well as for the majority of school districts in Tennessee. This measurement tool also addressed both qualitative and quantitative components. Fifty percent of this score is comprised of evaluations conducted by a school administrator or outside evaluator. The domains of planning, instruction, environment, and professionalism are included in this measure. The other 50% of the score comes from standardized test data. Maximum variation sampling was then used to select 5 second-career teacher participants that varied by first career, gender, years of teaching experience, and teaching assignment.

Interviews with the second-career teachers and school administrators were the primary means of data collection, along with a focus group of academic coaches. Ritchie and Lewis
(2003) recommended using focus groups as a spring-board to explore ideas related to the research. Information shared during focus groups could then be utilized to provide guidance during more in-depth interviews with individual participants. Individual interviews were conducted to provide each participant an opportunity to share their unique experiences related to the research questions, allowing multiple perspectives to be studied, as is the case with collective case study research (Ritchie & Lewis; Yin, 2009). Documentation, such as teacher lesson plans and reflective journals, played a role in this study as well, as they served the purpose of either augmenting or refuting the other forms of data that were collected (Yin).

**Delimitations and Limitations**

Delimitations in the study existed in the selection of the participants. First, only second-career elementary school teachers with less than 10 years of experience were chosen for this study. Research exists that addresses second-career teachers’ transition into middle and secondary schools. Second-career middle and high school teachers typically teach a specific subject in which they have a rich background. Therefore, much of their success is related to their content knowledge in the subject being taught (Berger & D’Ascoli, 2012; Boyd et al., 2011; Gifford, Snyder, & Cuddapah, 2013). Another delimitation was that participants were limited to highly effective second-career elementary school teachers in a specific region in northeast Tennessee, as identified by their teacher effectiveness score. The impetus of this study was to understand the skills that aid second-career teachers’ effectiveness in the classroom, so only teachers deemed highly effective by their teacher effectiveness score were considered for participation.

Potential limitations existed for this study. Due to the study’s location, it was likely that most of the participants attended one of the two teacher education institutions in the immediate
area. Discussion of the teacher education experience did not reveal much diversity. The vast majority of the teachers in the participating school district were Caucasian, so there was no variation with regard to the participants’ race. Three of the principal participants had served at their school for less than four years, so their familiarity with the second-career teacher participants was limited.

**Definitions**

1. *Effective teacher*- in this study, a teacher who earned an overall teacher effectiveness score of a 4 or 5, based on the Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model, which is comprised of observation data and standardized testing scores.

2. *Non-traditional teaching program*- a teacher education program that offers alternative pathways to teacher certification; often involves unique scheduling and accelerated coursework that allows a diverse group of students to enter the teaching workforce (Tigchelaar et al., 2010).

3. *Practicum*- components of teacher education programs that place students/prospective teachers into the classroom to gain authentic experience and develop teaching skills (Etherington, 2009).


5. *Second-career teacher*- teachers who have left a first career to enter the teaching profession (Etherington, 2009).

6. *STEM*- represents the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics; used to describe a career field or content areas in the education setting (Grier & Johnston, 2012).
7. *Teacher identity*- the constantly evolving representation in which teachers view themselves based upon their beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge about teaching (Avraamidou, 2014).

8. **TEAM-** Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model- evaluation system comprised of student test data and observations of which teacher effectiveness is measured in the state of Tennessee (“TEAM-TN,” n.d.).

**Summary**

This chapter provided the background for the study and the problem statement, which addressed the need for this study. The purpose statement and significance of the study were also shared in Chapter 1. The research questions were discussed and included citations to support the questions that were selected for the study. A brief description of the research plan was included in this chapter. Delimitations and limitations were considered in Chapter 1, and a list of definitions was included.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The second chapter examines the theoretical framework of the study, provides a review of literature pertaining to the topic, and offers a summary of the literature. Literature details motivations for choosing teaching as a second career as well as the benefits and challenges that second-career teachers encounter in their profession. The recruitment of second-career teachers as a method for improving teacher quality and raising student achievement is also addressed. In addition, a review of the literature regarding teacher education programs and professional development practices, especially as they pertain to second-career teachers, is found in this chapter. The summary provides a comprehensive look at the literature that provides the foundation for this study and addresses the current gaps in literature that establish the need for the current study.

Theoretical Framework

This collective case study was guided by a theoretical framework focusing on two learning theories often associated with adult learners. The first was experiential learning theory, which was developed by David Kolb in the mid 1980’s and addresses learning as a four-step process initiated by different situations and experiences. The second theory that drove this study was Jack Mezirow’s transformative learning theory, which emphasizes how one’s frame of reference through experience can build on one’s knowledge base. As data were collected, these two theories provided the lens through which the research was viewed.

Kolb’s Experiential Learning Theory

Kolb’s experiential learning theory is rooted in the belief that learning is a process shaped by experience in one’s environment. Experiential learning theory forms its foundation from the
works of Dewey’s pragmatism, Piaget’s cognitive theory, and Lewin’s work in the realm of social psychology. The theory views learning as an ever-changing adaptation to the environment and one’s lived experiences. Kolb’s theory states that people go through forms of action, reflection, feeling, and thinking when faced with different situations and experiences. This creates a holistic model in which learning is constantly shaped by one’s experiences (Chan, 2012; Kolb, 1984). “Ideas are not fixed and immutable elements of thought but are formed and re-formed through experience” (Kolb, p. 26).

Kolb’s experiential learning model consists of four major stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Concrete experience consists of the person actually being in an experience. Reflective observation involves making reflections about one’s own experience or reflecting on observations gathered from observing another person’s experience. The third stage, abstract conceptualization, occurs when one begins creating ideas or theories based on what has been experienced or observed. The final stage of Kolb’s model is active experimentation. This stage involves using ideas that have been theorized through experience and observation to make decisions and solve potential problems (Bergsteiner, Avery, & Neumann, 2010; Kolb, 1984; Kolb & Kolb, 2005). The acquiring of knowledge must be accompanied by a reflection of the content in order for true learning to occur (Bass, 2012; Green & Ballard, 2011). According to Kolb, learners need all four stages to attain new knowledge and skills. The four stages are highly connected, and all are important in the acquiring of new skills and building on previous knowledge, as they create a cycle in which learners will go through each stage of the model in learning. The acquisition of knowledge is affected by the context and setting of one’s experience (Kolb; Kolb & Kolb).
Learning space is another term associated with Kolb’s theory. The idea of learning space builds upon the life space concept constructed by Kurt Lewin (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Kolb’s description of learning space takes into account the interaction between person and environment to create particular regions in which learning takes place. This is highly dependent upon one’s learning style, which is measured using the Learning Styles Inventory (LSI). The implications for higher education (teacher education programs) involve the need to accommodate students by developing learning spaces that fit the learning styles and experiences of students.

Experiential learning activities constitute a major component of higher education programs. Knowledge gained during the coursework section of the program is applied in real-life situations through work placements and practicum experiences (Chan, 2012). Individuals construct meanings from these experiences, as well as their class work, as they progress through the different learning cycles (Kolb, 1984). Real-world experiences help students develop a deeper understanding of the process than traditional coursework can offer (Chan). In the case of teacher education students, they use student teaching, or an internship, to gain authentic experience that builds upon the classroom experience in their program (Green & Ballard, 2011). Given the diverse experiences of second-career teachers, teacher education programs could potentially capitalize on their wealth of experience by structuring their programs in a way that is more beneficial for adult learners (Snyder, 2011).

Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory

Mezirow’s transformative learning theory was first advanced while he was conducting a study that explored the experiences of women re-entering college or the work force after a period of time. He noted a personal transformation had occurred in the participants as they embarked on the experience, thus leading to the beginnings of his theory. The theory takes its roots in
Kuhn’s paradigm, Freire’s conscientization, and Habermas’ domains of learning, which influenced major concepts associated with transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1997).

Transformative learning theory addresses learning as a process that is affected by the frame of reference and perspective of the learner through experience (Kitchenham, 2008; Mezirow, 1997). The theory is typically associated with adult learning theory because of the premium placed on experience and perspective of the learner. Adults carry a base of prior knowledge with them into learning situations. This prior knowledge must be reshaped, or transformed, to absorb new information and develop new perspectives of a situation (Bass, 2012). The theory focuses on the need to form independent learners who are able to think and make decisions.

Several major constructs constitute transformative learning theory. Point of view details the lens through which people view their experiences. Secondly, frame of reference provides the suppositions through which people make sense of their experiences to develop meaning and understanding (Mezirow, 1997). These frames of reference are constantly reshaped and validated through experience to provide new perspectives for learning (Snyder, 2011). Next, discourse is dialogue that involves the evaluation of situations through the use of evidence and multiple points of view. Lastly, habits of mind involve the beliefs and feelings that have become entrenched in a person through experience (Mezirow).

Transformative learning theory addresses learning as being a recreation or interpretation of what they already know in some instances. Kitchenham (2008) stated, “Learning within meaning schemes involves learners working with what they already know by expanding on, complementing, and revisiting their present systems of knowledge” (p. 111). New knowledge that is compatible with existing learning schemes leads to a second learning process, but there
are connections to prior knowledge (Kitchenham; Mezirow, 1997). The learner’s ability to think from multiple points of view and examine situations through different frames of reference leads to a greater understanding of the experience.

Career changers undergo major shifts in the way they view a new profession as they transition from a first career to another. Through reflection and socialization, learners critically examine their own beliefs and often develop new perspectives that are contrary to their previous expectations (Bass, 2012). A close examination of the existing assumptions is imperative for one to gain a greater understanding and transform those beliefs into new learning (Jones, 2009). A study by Poutiatine and Conners (2012) found that participants in a graduate leadership program were greatly impacted by the deep engagement and reflection defined in transformation learning, as the end result of their learning experience left them changed, as if a new person had surfaced from their experience. In the case of second-career teachers, their frames of reference transform as they incorporate new experiences into their existing beliefs on teaching (Snyder, Oliveira, & Paska, 2013). Educators need to develop an awareness of how their evolving philosophies influence their actions in the classroom (Poutiatine & Conners). Reflective practice is paramount in the building of professional knowledge in education (Jones).

**Related Literature**

**Teacher Quality**

The classroom teacher is widely recognized as the single most important factor in relation to student achievement (Goldhaber & Hansen, 2010; Grant, Stronge, & Ward, 2011; Pretorius, 2012; Stecher, Garet, Holtzman, & Hamilton, 2012). Effective teachers can make considerable differences in student learning. As Watson, Miller, Davis, and Carter (2010) affirmed, previous research supports a direct relationship between teacher ability and student achievement,
highlighting the need to develop more effective teachers. In response to the need for better teachers, educational reforms with an increased focus on teacher accountability and student performance continue to generate discussion regarding the role of the classroom teacher in the learning process (Block, Crochet, Jones, & Papa, 2012). Once the classroom teacher’s role is more clearly defined in the learning process, specific actions can be taken to improve practice.

In response to the need for good teachers, educators have sought ways to identify the characteristics of effective teachers through research and discussion (Watson et al., 2010). This has proven to be a cumbersome endeavor as discrepancies abound relating to how effective teachers should be identified. In fact, several hundred observational systems have been created to assess teacher effectiveness, further supporting the idea that no clear definition exists of what constitutes an effective teacher (Strong, Gargani, & Hacifazlioglu, 2011). Pinpointing the characteristics of effective teachers plays a pivotal role in decision making as it relates to teacher preparation at the university level, hiring practices, professional development, and teacher evaluation (Grant et al., 2011; Grossman et al., 2013; Stecher et al., 2012). This is especially important as identifying the most effective teachers allows administrators to assign the most needful students to their classes as well as to tailor professional learning to meet their individual needs (Stecher et al.).

Previous research reveals a diverse set of characteristics and skills found in effective teachers, even though many educators consider these practices to be a mystery (Bright, 2012). For example, in a study by Watson et al. (2010), teachers actually listed teacher affect as the top quality found in effective teachers. Along those same lines, Block et al. (2012) identified effective teachers as those who were student centered, but also possessed an extensive amount of content knowledge and displayed certain dispositions such as enthusiasm and flexibility. In
addition, Bright mentioned the ability to motivate students by increasing the relevance for students as a characteristic found in effective teachers.

Teacher quality, highlighted by the personal skills, characteristics, and pedagogical practice, significantly affect student achievement in schools (Williams & Forgasz, 2009). Quality teachers collaborate with colleagues and build relationships with students, parents, and peers to facilitate student and teacher learning (Young, 2009). Effective teachers also make a commitment to improve their instructional practice as well as to internalize the expectations they have for their students (Bright, 2012). They have a passion for learning and work to inspire students to maximize their potential, earning the respect of their students as they care for them and demonstrate the qualities of fairness and respect through their own actions (Watson et al., 2010; Young). By engaging in these types of practices, these first-rate educators create a positive learning environment in their classrooms in which students’ academic, social, and personal needs are recognized as they establish worthwhile connections with their pupils (Grant et al., 2011).

The method in which effective teachers deliver instruction impacts student learning. Strategies such as strong eye contact, continuous movement, student proximity, and voice control lead to more effective instruction (Bright, 2012). In addition, Grant et al. (2011) suggested that a teacher’s verbal ability has a profound impact on student learning with over four decades of research supporting this finding. Technology integration, differentiated instruction, and superior questioning techniques were also identified as practices used by high quality teachers in their instructional delivery. Additionally, effective teachers set high expectations for all students and use assessments to tailor instruction for the needs of each student (Young, 2009).
They are in a state of continuous reflection regarding their instructional practice and seek feedback from their peers as they develop ways to improve their craft (Watson et al., 2010). Methods for assessing teacher effectiveness must be carefully studied to ensure that student learning is maximized (Block et al., 2012). Researchers must take into account the context and setting in which the teacher works as it plays a significant role in teacher effectiveness (Newton, Darling-Hammond, Haertel, & Thomas, 2010; Young, 2009). The same teacher in a different setting could yield different results with regard to student learning. Expectations must also be tempered in the early years of teaching, as research has revealed a sharp increase in effectiveness during the first two years in the field before quickly flattening out (Staiger & Rockoff, 2010). This must factor in so administrators can provide support for teachers as they continue to grow throughout their early years in the classroom. In the dynamic world of education, modifications to assessments, increases in the availability of data, and changes to instructional practice warrant careful consideration when identifying effective teachers (Grant et al., 2011).

Evaluation instruments need to reflect the different levels of effectiveness that exist between teachers (Block et al., 2012). Determining ways to do this is challenging, as experts debate the best way to rate teacher effectiveness; teacher qualifications, instructional practice, and student performance are among the most popular choices for assessing teachers (Grant et al., 2011). However, inconsistencies across grade levels and subject areas, even at the same school, make it difficult to declare one assessment measure superior to the others, and alternatives continue to emerge to address the issue of teacher effectiveness (Bracey, 2009). The complex nature of teaching and learning make it unlikely that any single measure can truly portray a teacher’s effectiveness (Grossman et al., 2013). In response, several states and districts have
developed their own evaluation systems that take student performance data, student surveys, and teacher observations into account when evaluating teachers (Stecher et al., 2012).

Classroom observations by an administrator, including the analysis of lesson plans and student work, have been one method for evaluating teachers, but questions have arisen concerning the reliability of observation scores when compared with student achievement data. Issues concerning the number of observations needed for acceptable reliability and validity have been mentioned by skeptics of the observation process as well (Strong et al., 2011). Many researchers consider classroom observations to be much too flawed to be included when measuring teacher effectiveness (Kane, Taylor, Tyler, & Wooten, 2011). However, classroom observations continue to be a component of many teacher evaluation systems, even though these practices are often too time consuming to be used regularly by school administrators. In addition, many studies have found a very insignificant association, if any, between classroom observation scores and student achievement data (Strong et al.), leading one to question which is more important when it comes to identifying quality teachers.

Initiatives calling for the use of high-stakes testing to evaluate teachers have linked student performance to teacher accountability (Newton et al., 2010). Value-added measures, which estimate the effect teachers and schools have on student learning primarily through achievement tests, have become more prominent in recent years (Kane et al., 2011; Strong et al., 2011), as data have become more widely available (Staiger & Rockoff, 2010). In a sense, these measures classify teachers as effective or ineffective without observing in the teacher’s classroom since they are dependent upon student growth on standardized testing from year to year (Bracey, 2009). Adding to these complications is the fact that not all grade levels and subject areas have standardized tests available, which leads to questions as to how these teachers
should be evaluated. In fact, this concern is supported by Kane et al. who found that roughly one fourth of K-12 classroom teachers teach in an area where standardized testing can be used for evaluation purposes. For some courses, there is no distinct learning progression that supports the measurement of learning gains from one year to the next (Newton et al.). Opponents also argue that a teacher’s true value cannot be measured by student performance on a single test that fails to account for student factors out of the teacher’s control (Grossman et al., 2013; Newton et al.; Stecher et al., 2012). Detractors also point to the non-random assignment of students to teachers and the limitations of the knowledge and skills assessed by these tests as potentially problematic when assessing teacher effectiveness (Newton et al.).

**Recruitment of Second Career Teachers**

Teacher shortages have led many school districts to examine policies and practices related to teacher recruitment and development (Bruinsma & Jansen, 2010; Tigchelaar et al., 2010; Williams & Forgasz, 2009). According to a 2011 report by The National Center for Education Information, new teacher hires for the 2007-2008 school year consisted of over 50,000 delayed entrants, which are described as those who did not enter the teaching workforce following graduation (Olson, 2011). These teachers carry a unique set of skills and experiences to the classroom and add another dimension to the teacher workforce. This diverse group of entry-level teachers along with the distinct focus on raising student achievement scores has forced schools to be more calculated with the acquiring and developing of effective teachers (Boyd, et al., 2011).

The number of career changers in general continues to trend upward, indicating that most people will change careers at some point during their lifetime (Barclay, Stoltz, & Chung, 2011). When workers look to transition to a different career, several factors exist that can potentially
lead them to their new career. Murtagh, Lopes, and Lyons’ (2011) study reported career changers often choose a new career in which they feel competent, and initial positive emotions in relation to the career direct them toward that career path. Individuals who enter teaching after a first career are potentially beneficial to this field because of their combination of content knowledge, work experience, life experience, and professional skills (Fry & Anderson, 2011). One such example is that of Childre (2014), who reported the impact a teacher’s content area expertise has in increasing student achievement, which is increasingly crucial in education. Their depth of content knowledge acquired in their previous degree program and work experience is often superior to that of teacher education programs, which allows them to answer complex questions related to the content (Fry & Anderson). Their competencies and experiences from a first career assist teachers as they connect classroom learning with real-world scenarios. Providing opportunities for real-word application adds relevance for the students as they learn new material (Tigchelaar et al., 2010).

In addition to greater content knowledge, career changers who enter into teaching are also equipped with general professional skills that were developed in a first career (Fry & Anderson, 2011). Skills such as communication, organization, and problem-solving skills assist second-career teachers as they navigate their daily responsibilities in the classroom. The ability to communicate with students, parents, and colleagues plays an important role in being a successful teacher as well as having the ability to think quickly and critically as situations present themselves throughout the day (Etherington, 2009). Planning and managing skills that were developed in a previous career also serve second-career teachers well. Understanding how to plan lessons and provide effective classroom management provide second-career teachers with
some of the foundational elements needed to lead a classroom successfully (Tigchelaar et al., 2010).

Second-career teachers have often gained people management skills that transition well to a second-career in teaching. Some have held supervisory positions, many of which involve working in a collaborative environment characterized by group decision making and goal setting (Etherington, 2009). The dynamic nature of many professions leads workers to develop professional flexibility as their previous responsibilities were constantly evolving. Possessing this characteristic is pivotal for all teachers as their roles are frequently changing. Second-career teachers are often better equipped to adapt to these changes (Fry & Anderson, 2011). The confidence in one’s ability to learn and connect their existing knowledge to a new career can also play an important role in the transition to teaching (Etherington).

Career changers sometimes have developed skills and characteristics that have become so routine that they are engrained into their daily practices (Smith, 2001). This is referred to as tacit knowledge and is developed through personal experiences that become such a part of one’s daily life that the person may be unaware that they possess these skills (Chilton & Bloodgood, 2008). The idea of tacit knowledge proposes that our skills and competencies come about as a result of interactions with others that are developed over time (Turner, 2012). For second-career teachers, their interactions with others during their first career have allowed them to build and develop skills that were unique to their first career. This allows them to bring different perspectives to the classroom, which is often difficult or impossible to replicate.

Individuals can unwittingly develop certain skills through interactions in their first career that ultimately lead them to a place where they know more than they can actually convey. It is possible for certain competencies to become such a part of one’s life that a person is unable to
recognize the presence of the skills and actions are performed almost automatically and without thought. This is developed over time and cannot be passed on other than through the interactions and experiences (Ribeiro, 2013). Smith (2001) argued that tacit knowledge is based on common sense and can play an important role with workers who may lack the proper training. For workers who are fortunate enough to receive adequate education in their new field, tacit knowledge enhances their ability to perform well.

The recruitment of second-career teachers, who have experiences and skills in areas other than education, has become a strategy for many school districts (Tigchelaar et al., 2010). Many school districts have enlisted STEM professionals to account for shortages in the areas of math and science education (Grier & Johnston, 2012). The strong content knowledge these professionals bring with them from a first career constitutes one main argument for pursuing career switchers to enter teaching, since they can focus more on pedagogy to accompany their strong content knowledge (Berger & D’Ascoli, 2012; Boyd et al., 2011; Gifford et al., 2013). In much the same way, Tan’s (2012) findings suggested that second-career teachers draw upon prior knowledge and skills from their previous profession to enrich their instructional practice. The richness of their content knowledge allows them to finely tune their pedagogical practices and classroom management techniques, as opposed to spending the majority of their time learning the content.

Career switchers into teaching come from a variety of backgrounds with experience in a diversity of fields, which can play an important role in their transition (Boyd et al., 2011). In many cases, enlisting second-career teachers is a much smoother transition than employing first-career teachers. Career changers in one study discussed the similarities between their previous and new career, which created a sense of continuity with the move (Murtagh et al., 2011). This
is often seen in the area of vocational education, also referred to as career technical education, when a move from a first career into teaching is viewed as a continuation of the previous career, as opposed to a brand new career (Berger & D’Ascoli, 2012). In addition to the skills they developed in a previous profession, career changers are often parents who are more comfortable with the authoritative aspect of being a teacher than first-career teachers are (Wilson & Deaney, 2010). For example, second-career teachers, who are often seasoned parents, are able to approach issues from a variety of perspectives, which proves beneficial in their role as a classroom teacher (Grier & Johnston, 2012) as well as in the development of their teacher identity (Friesen & Besley, 2013).

The increase in the number of career changers into teaching requires a greater consideration of how these new teachers learn so teacher education programs and schools can provide appropriate direction for developing quality teachers (Williams, 2010). The wealth of experience that career changers carry with them to a second profession is not enough to adequately prepare them for their new career (Barclay et al., 2011). Second-career teachers need to find ways to effectively intertwine their first-career skills into teaching, which requires them to develop a firm understanding of both careers and how they connect (Grier & Johnston, 2012). One of the first steps may involve an orientation to the teaching profession that allows career changers to learn more about the demands of teaching, visit classrooms early in their teacher education program, and spend ample time with an advisor to insure a teaching career is well-suited for them (Mahon & Packman, 2011).

**Motivations for Teaching**

Numerous factors have been cited as motivations for choosing teaching as a career, but the dominant explanation lies in the intrinsic rewards available for teachers (Bruinsma & Jansen,
For example, in Watt and Richardson’s (2012) study, teacher candidates were aware that teaching was a demanding job that entailed hard work, yet offered little in terms of social status and salary. Despite this, the teacher candidates were satisfied with their choice to teach due to the intrinsic rewards they received. In fact, various studies have noted the opportunity to work with children and make a difference in their lives as major factors for becoming a teacher (Fokkens-Bruinsma & Canrinus, 2012; Lee, 2010; Uusimaki, 2011; Williams & Forgasz). Along the same lines, those coming from a previous career wanted to engage in something more meaningful and viewed teaching as a way to provide a positive influence for others. Taylor and Hallam (2011) found that the positive learning experiences with one’s own teachers offered additional motivation to enter teaching, as participants in a study of second-career music teachers cited inspiration from a teacher as their reason for pursuing a teaching career.

While intrinsic rewards may provide the main onus for pursuing a teaching career, there are extrinsic factors that also exist. Often, there are issues that push workers out of a first career. At the same time, other factors pull them toward teaching, as identified in Berger and D’Ascoli’s (2012) study in which long holidays, increased job security, and social status were listed as motivators for entering the teaching profession. In addition, corporate reorganizations and downsizing, retirement, and empty-nest syndrome were other reasons cited as factors for leaving one career to enter teaching. An additional reason for pursuing a teaching career was the desire to do something unique and challenging (Wilcox & Samaras, 2009). Watt and Richardson’s (2012) study found that factors such as job security and pleasurable working conditions played a larger role in the decision to become a teacher than the financial rewards and social status that came with the change. On a different note, participants in one study were actually motivated to
become teachers because of negative experiences they had endured themselves when they were students, and they sought to provide a better experience for others than what they encountered (Taylor & Hallam, 2011).

Castro and Bauml (2009) identified four major reasons for actually pursuing a career change to teaching. The first was the availability of resources, which included having knowledge of how to become a teacher as well as having the support of friends and family to engage in the change. The second component was referred to as latitude, which involved having the financial stability and time to go back to school. The third motivation they identified was commitment readiness, which highlighted their ability to overcome uncertainty and actually pursue the career change. A final factor was program accessibility and the ease of transitioning into teaching as a second career. These four factors helped facilitate the actual move from a first career to a second career in teaching.

Many people who choose teaching as a second career have actually had some teaching responsibilities in their previous careers. Likewise, many career changers have served as volunteers in after-school programs or church-related functions where teaching was required. These types of experiences have led many career changers to pursue teaching full-time (Castro & Bauml, 2009; Wilcox & Samaras, 2009). Some people are motivated to enter the teaching profession because they feel it will afford them the opportunity to utilize skills that have already been acquired in a previous job (Etherington, 2011). In fact, one study conducted by Carless and Arnup (2011) found that more educated workers changed careers than those with limited education, in part because of their ability to adapt and learn the skills needed for a second career.

Studying the motivations for entering teaching is important, but it is also important to examine the motivations for staying in the profession. While many are entering the field of
education, many have also returned to their first career after only a brief time in the classroom (Burkman, 2012; Etherington, 2009; Tigchelaar et al., 2012). Studies such as the one conducted by Bruinsma and Jansen (2010) examined teachers’ motivation to not just enlist in a teaching career, but remain in the profession as well. This correlational study found that teachers who entered the profession because of intrinsic motivations were more likely to stay in the teaching field for a longer period of time.

The motivations for entering and remaining in the teaching profession can change over time. For example, a study conducted by Fokkens-Bruinsma and Canrinus (2012) revealed changes in participants’ motivations for entering the field of education. Two groups of secondary school teacher education students completed questionnaires at different points in their program regarding their motivations to teach. The group surveyed earlier in the program cited the opportunity to help children as their main motivation to teach, while the second group, surveyed at the end of the program, listed social influences as their primary motivation. The opportunity to collaborate with colleagues and engage in the school shifted their motivation for teaching. This study leads one to conclude that motivations to remain in the teaching profession may change over time.

**Teacher Education Programs**

Nontraditional teacher education programs and alternative certification pathways have existed in the United States for more than 20 years and offer flexibility for career changers to enter into teaching (Tigchelaar et al., 2010). An increase in the number of alternative programs (Childre, 2014) is evident as every state in the United States currently has some type of alternative pathway to achieve teacher licensure (Olson, 2011). More specifically, nontraditional programs for underrepresented groups provide opportunities for more people to enter the
teaching profession (Mercado, 2011). For example, the Troops to Teachers program assists former military staff in their journey to become teachers, and fast track programs to transition math and science graduates and professionals into teaching have begun to increase in some areas through programs like Harvard’s MidCareer Math and Science Program (Boyd et al., 2011) and IBM’s Transition to Teaching Program (Olson).

The uniqueness of nontraditional entrants to teacher education programs can lead to challenges within teaching programs. While programs are available, few, if any, are directed at easing the transition of career changers into teaching (Uusimaki, 2011). Teacher education programs should consider adding a professional development component as a way to provide networking opportunities for second-career teachers once they graduate and enter teaching full-time (Wilcox & Samaras, 2009). This is especially important as second-career teacher education students can experience a disconnect with their classmates and develop feelings of isolation and disengagement, making it difficult to network and develop professional relationships with their colleagues (Williams, 2010). Issues such as these minimize socialization and are detrimental to the development of teacher identity for pre-service teachers (Grier & Johnston, 2012).

In order to adequately provide for the needs of career changers into teaching, teacher education programs need to gain a better understanding of the needs of these students. Teachers’ beliefs about teaching and learning are influenced by both professional and personal experiences, such as their own schooling, parenting, and other occupations (Williams, 2010). Therefore, teacher education programs should work to develop an educational experience that accounts for the diverse experiences of career change students. In a study by Bruinsma and Jansen (2010), the satisfaction of pre-service teachers with their teacher education program was examined. One important finding from the study revealed that students who harbored highly intrinsic
motivations for entering teaching showed greater satisfaction with their teacher education program, leading one to question how much attention teacher education programs are paying to the incoming students’ motivations to become teachers.

A significant part of most teacher education programs involves a field experience referred to as an internship, student teaching, or practicum. The lessons learned during the coursework component of the teacher education program may seem irrelevant until pre-service teachers actually have the chance to work with students during field placements (Snyder et al., 2013). This authentic experience has a profound impact on future teachers’ desire to stay in the teaching profession (Mahon & Packman, 2011). Etherington’s (2009) study described the practicum experience of a group of second-career teachers who felt their previous experiences had not been taken into account with the design of the practicum. The participants recommended a constructivist approach focused on self-directed learning that would account for existing skills and prior experiences to provide a more worthwhile experience for second-career teachers. “This view reinforces the idea that previous career and life experiences of second-career teachers are powerful determinants for any new learning to take place” (Etherington, p. 40). In order to retain and encourage second-career teachers, teacher education programs need to make sure their skills and experiences are utilized and valued within the school (Williams, 2010).

As teacher education students develop their professional identity, it is imperative that teacher education programs aid them in the process to ensure a smooth transition to a teaching career (Wilson & Deaney, 2010). Experience alone cannot adequately aid teacher education students and beginning teachers with their professional identity development (Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011). The availability of information regarding the formation of a teacher identity should be a part of the teacher education curriculum in order to ease the transition into the
beginning years of teaching and avoid the shock that could occur when their perceptions of teaching do not match the reality of teaching (Chong, Low, & Goh, 2011; Thomas & Beauchamp). This disparity between expectation and reality can cause identity tensions, which can arise in situations in which a student’s view of teaching contradicts a mentor’s. Circumstances like this need to be addressed so student teachers can manage these pressures of working with a mentor but still develop their own professional identity (Pillen, Brok, & Beijaard, 2013).

Professional Development

In order for teachers to grow sufficiently in their profession, quality professional development must be available and appropriate for each teacher. An increased emphasis on student achievement makes it paramount that the current teacher workforce continues to adapt and grow (Boyd et al., 2011; Looney, 2011). While the makeup of the professional development activity plays a major role, a teacher’s willingness and ability to invest in these practices also plays a significant part in professional development (Harris & Sass, 2011), as does a teacher’s learning preferences and patterns (Vermunt & Endedijk, 2011). Factors regarding teacher beliefs about particular subjects, curriculum, and non-instructional elements such as teacher-student relationships influence teacher buy-in for a particular professional development activity (Eren, 2012). In addition, the career stage of teachers influences their views of professional development, both regarding the engagement and type of activity. Older, more experienced teachers typically participate less in professional development than their younger counterparts and rely more heavily on self-directed, informal professional development activities (Richter, Kunter, Klusmann, Ludtke, & Baumert, 2011).
Professional development activities are often designed to address shortcomings in either content or pedagogy. The potential impact from content-centered professional development is apparent in Harris and Sass’ (2011) study that found gains in student achievement for middle and high school math teachers after engaging in content-specific professional development activities, but these results were not reflected at the elementary level for reading or math. This same study revealed great improvements in student achievement for math and reading when elementary school teachers engaged in on-the-job professional development experiences. Middle school reading teachers also witnessed gains in student achievement through on-the-job professional training activities. The results were especially true for teachers with less than ten years of experience, which demonstrates the value of experience when compared to formal in-service learning opportunities for elementary and middle school teachers.

The teaching profession is comprised of diverse groups of individuals, but these differences often go unaccounted for in professional development activities. Teachers bring certain ideas, skills, and expertise to the table during their involvement with a professional development activity (Musanti & Pence, 2010). Taking this into account can produce positive results as evidenced in a study by Tigchelaar et al. (2010), which found that “integrating previous career experiences with new experiences had a positive influence on second-career teachers’ learning” (p. 174). Unfortunately, this is not common practice as professional development initiatives, in general, are rarely linked to targeted areas of need (Looney, 2011) and may be too uniform to differentiate for learners’ needs (Harris & Sass, 2011). For example, a 2012 study of novice teachers’ professional development experiences found that over 70% of the participants had never been presented with professional development programs that addressed identified challenges for them (Burkman, 2012). Neglecting second-career teachers’
experiences and needs will not yield the type of professional growth that one desires. On the other hand, positive outcomes can be achieved by creating more dynamic professional development opportunities that allow for collaboration between participants and capitalize on their unique backgrounds (Musanti & Pence).

The aim of professional development, both informal and formal, is to change instructional practice to raise student achievement. Parise and Spillan (2010) categorized professional development into three categories: formal professional development programs, collaboration with colleagues, or a combination of the two. Their study found that both types of professional development led to teacher changes in instructional practice that yielded increases in student achievement. However, a balanced approach to professional development is necessary for maximum effectiveness. As Burkman (2012) stated, “Too much professional development can be just as effective as too little.” Traditional forms of professional development often require teachers to be away from their classrooms to attend training, typically leaving a less effective substitute teacher to provide instruction for the class (Harris & Sass, 2011). In other words, the knowledge and strategies acquired during professional development meant to raise student achievement may be negated by the absence of regular instruction supplied by the classroom teacher. Educators must find ways to engage in valuable professional development activities without taking away from daily instruction.

Another concern that often arises with professional development was discussed by Musanti and Pence (2010). This study found that as teachers are asked to engage in collaborative practices such as mentoring, team teaching, and co-teaching, they may get so wrapped up in this particular role that they do not focus as much on their own classroom. This issue can become as problematic as teachers who are out of the classroom to attend workshops.
On the other hand, it can be argued that these collaborative practices break down the feelings of isolation often expressed by teachers, especially beginning teachers (Jewett & MacPhee, 2012). This allows for the nurturing of strong collegial relationships in which trust is valued and teachers can provide feedback for one another, helping them improve at their craft and ultimately improve student learning (Musanti & Pence).

**Transition to Teaching as a Second Career**

Second-career teachers’ unique personal and professional experiences can play an important role in the classroom as they bring different beliefs, expertise, and expectations with them (Etherington, 2009; Fry & Anderson, 2011; Tigchelaar et al., 2012). Characteristics such as maturity, interpersonal skills, and professionalism were recognized as factors that aided career changers into their new teaching role (Etherington; Richardson & Watt, 2006). In addition, Etherington’s study (2011) of the worldviews and perceptions of mature-aged pre-service teachers found that participants were constantly linking things back to their previous careers. This finding was echoed in Trent and Gao’s (2009) study, which reported that second-career teachers constantly drew from previous educational experiences and work experiences.

Second-career teachers undergo a highly personal transformation as they transition into their roles as teachers (Tigchelaar et al., 2012). Some have difficulties with this transition as they go from being an expert in one field to novice status as a teacher (Grier & Johnston, 2012). In addition, depending upon the teachers’ first career, dissatisfaction with their new salary and responsibilities may occur (Barclay et al., 2011). Along the same lines, Snyder et al. (2013) examined the transition of STEM professionals to teaching and cited the importance of viewing the career change to teaching as a “social rebirth rather than social death” (p. 634) in terms of
people’s perceptions of teaching compared to the prestige associated with a STEM career. These teachers must make adjustments to the change in salary and social stature from a first career.

Finding ways to link previous career experiences with new experiences can positively impact learning (Tigchelaar et al., 2010) and help establish new perceptions of teaching and learning for second-career teachers. Teacher education programs often aid in modifying perceptions of what it means to be a teacher, but the transition from student to teacher is an ongoing process that requires the assistance of mentors and colleagues. Difficulties often arise as second-career teachers must find a way to balance their lack of expertise in their teacher education experience with the expectations often placed on them because of their success in a previous career. Some may assume that the accomplishments from a first career will translate into success in their new career. Even though career changers bring an element of maturity and experience, they still need support in order to become competent teachers (Williams, 2010).

While many second-career teachers felt they had valuable skills obtained in a previous career, many felt their schools did very little to capitalize on their expertise and experience (Etherington, 2009; Lee, 2010; Trent & Gao, 2009). Trent and Gao declared that schools should strive to better utilize the first-career competencies of second-career teachers in order to assist in the transition to their new careers. However, Tan (2012) found that not all first-career skills are able to be successfully integrated into teaching, and one might also argue that in some instances second-career teachers do not actually possess the skills they claim to bring with them from a first career (Williams & Forgasz, 2009). One solution to bridge the gap from a first career to a second career in teaching involved assigning a mentor to second-career teachers to help them navigate their new career (Castro & Bauml, 2009). In order to account for the teachers’ first career, it is imperative that the mentor be open to and value the experiences these teachers
possess (Etherington; Williams, 2010). Another solution involved providing opportunities for second-career teachers to co-teach and engage in collaborative planning with veteran teachers as a way to ease the transition and provide support for second-career teachers (Trent & Gao). By engaging teachers in collaborative activities, the feelings of isolation that often lead to teacher attrition could be reduced (Fry & Anderson, 2011).

Second-career teachers often face challenges in their transition to teaching. Managing the demands of school, family, and other non-instructional tasks can be difficult for those entering teaching (Wilcox & Samaras, 2009). Career changers often pursue teaching as a second career with the belief that teaching will be more family friendly in terms of the time spent working. However, they often end up disappointed once they realize they bring a significant amount of work home, which cuts into the time spent with family (Grier & Johnston, 2012; Wilson & Deaney, 2010). Their expectations do not match the reality in this regard.

Another challenge facing second-career teachers involves their actual first career background. While many believe that the majority of second-career teachers come from elite professions, this is not always the case. Several studies have revealed that the majority of second-career teachers are coming from non-elite fields, which does little to provide the strong content knowledge that may be expected of second-career teachers (Boyd et al., 2011). The idea that all second-career teachers come with a wealth of content knowledge in a specific content area is not always the case.

Tan (2012) found that having previous work experience does not automatically mean one will be a good fit for teaching. Prior experiences might actually inhibit second-career teachers from being open to new ways of learning (Snyder, 2011). Their perceptions of teaching, which could have been influenced by previous career experiences, can conflict with the traditional
understandings of what it means to be a teacher (Trent & Gao, 2009; Wilcox & Samaras, 2009). This is supported in a study conducted by Boyd et al. (2011) that revealed second-career teachers were less effective at teaching math during their first year of teaching than teachers with no previous work experience, highlighting the idea that not all first-career work experience and skills transition successfully to the classroom. In addition, this study also revealed no instances that suggested that second-career teachers were more effective than first-career teachers, which leads one to question the recruitment of these teachers.

One explanation for the underperforming of some second-career teachers was presented by Williams (2010), as the results of her study pointed to the teachers’ reliance on extensive content knowledge and reluctance to develop the pedagogical skills necessary to actually teach the content effectively. Having the skills and content knowledge from a first career without the necessary pedagogical knowledge made the transition difficult for second-career teachers. The presence of strong instructional practice must accompany the wealth of content knowledge for second-career teachers to be successful. This was evident in Fry and Anderson’s (2011) study of second-career teachers, in which participants encountered challenges explaining difficult concepts to struggling students, even though the participants were well versed in the subject matter. Having a vast amount of content knowledge could be deemed irrelevant for second-career teachers if they are unable to teach it to their students.

Challenges including the makeup of traditional teacher education programs, feelings on disconnectedness with their supervisors who are often poorly prepared to deal with second-career teachers, and the organizational leadership structures in schools can prove to be detrimental to the success of second-career teachers (Etherington, 2009). Williams (2010) discussed the challenge of meeting higher standards due to previous experience. Since career changers into
teaching bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to their position, their colleagues often have higher expectations for them, even though they are novice teachers (Fry & Anderson, 2011). In addition, teachers who had been in leadership positions in a previous occupation felt disengaged with the top-down leadership approach that minimizes teachers in the decision-making process found in so many schools today (Etherington; Fry & Anderson). Second-career teachers also noted the unpredictability educators face as they enter their classrooms each day as a challenge (Snyder, 2011). Tigchelaar et al. (2012) and Trent and Gao (2009) suggested the benefits of having second-career teachers share their first-career experiences and skills with the school’s faculty and staff. By doing so, administration would be showing the value of second-career teachers and provide them with leadership opportunities, which could build confidence and trust.

Another area of concern regarding second-career teachers is the ability to keep them in the field, as a difficult transition to the classroom can lead many teachers to leave the profession after a short period of time (Gifford et al., 2013). For many teachers, teaching may be their second, or even third, career, so the idea of transiency can come in to play. As pointed out in a study by Boyd et al. (2011), second-career teachers are more likely to leave their job after their first year of teaching than first-career teachers. To further support this claim, Tan (2012) shared the following:

They may have their reasons for leaving their previous career teaching, but if they can decide to leave their previous career for teaching, it is not entirely implausible that they may choose to walk away from teaching if they perceive themselves to be not good at it. (p. 23)
Teacher Identity

Second-career teachers often experience challenges in establishing their identity as a teacher. “Teacher identity is both a product, a result of influences on the teacher, as well as a process that is not fixed but an ongoing dynamic interaction within teacher development” (Chong, et al., 2011, p. 51). Education’s increased focus on content, pedagogy, and standardized test data has diminished the need for teachers to truly understand themselves and reflect on their beliefs of teaching (Kim & Greene, 2011). In many instances, new teachers enter the classroom unable to comprehend what is expected of teachers in schools today, as teachers must assume a variety of roles in the rapidly changing world of education (Grier & Johnston, 2012; Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011). Without a well-developed teacher identity, teachers may not be able to assume any sense of autonomy with regard to curriculum and planning lessons that best benefit their students (Schultz & Ravitch, 2013).

As teachers enter into the profession, their past experiences and perceptions of teaching help mold their teacher identity (Chong, 2011; Pillen et al., 2013; Tigchelaar et al., 2014), but it is constantly developing and undergoing changes (Avraamidou, 2014; Jewett & MacPhee, 2012). The earliest foundations and initial impressions of education for those entering teaching are influenced by societal and cultural beliefs about teaching. These preconceived notions of teaching often reflect the motivations for becoming a teacher, which can lead to challenges if one’s beliefs about teaching do not match the reality of teaching (Chong et al., 2011). In the case of second-career teachers, their previous career experiences provide knowledge and qualities that impact their new professional identity as a teacher (Tigchelaar et al.). This adds an extra dynamic as their earliest beliefs about teaching are influenced by their first career, then shaped even more as they transition into the classroom.
Teacher identity is a very personal, constantly evolving process that is continually influenced by a number of factors (Chong et al., 2011; Pillen et al., 2013; Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2013; Schultz & Ravitch, 2013; Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011; Wilson & Deaney, 2010). The expectations for teachers and their assumption of new roles lead to the formation of professional identities that are more vibrant than in the past (Thomas & Beauchamp). Chong et al. suggested that teacher identity develops over time as teachers respond to their experience and begin to place greater value on the skills and knowledge they have gained. As a result of these new experiences, new teaching philosophies and beliefs emerge causing their teacher identity to evolve (Kim & Greene, 2011). In addition, changes to traditional practices in teaching influence identity because teachers learn to view ideas in different contexts and form new beliefs about teaching (Chong et al.; Schultz & Ravitch). For example, the isolated nature of teaching that has been prominent for years is being challenged by initiatives that focus on collaborative practices, causing teachers to view their roles differently (Musanti & Pence, 2010). New approaches such as this can present challenges to career changers since many enter teaching with a more traditional teaching philosophy (Fry & Anderson, 2011). When the reality of their new career does not match the expectations, teachers may struggle to develop their teacher identity.

Teacher education experiences, including both coursework and field placements, play a key role in the identity development of student teachers (Timostsuk & Ugaste, 2010). Pre-service teachers’ experiences before and during their teacher education program combine with personal beliefs and values to form an initial teacher identity, which typically reflects a wide array of ideas concerning teaching and the type of teacher they envision becoming (Chong et al., 2011). This does not occur without some challenges, as teachers often feel obligated to take on a similar view of teaching as their mentor, even though their own perspective on teaching differs
(Pillen et al., 2013). In a 2013 study by Schultz and Ravitch, pre-service teachers shared that they often felt overshadowed by their mentor teacher and were not able to truly be the type of teacher they wanted to be. They felt forced to conform to the expectations of the mentor and reflect their beliefs of what a teacher should be. In order to alleviate this type of issue and allow student teachers to gain confidence and nurture their own teacher identity, they need to feel supported by their supervisors and mentors (Timostsuk & Ugaste). The influence of a mentor should only be one component of their developing teacher identity.

Student teachers build their teacher identity as they navigate their roles as a student, teacher, and colleague (Anh, 2013). Thomas and Beauchamp (2011) recommended changes to teacher education programs to assist students in the development of their teacher identity as they transition into the classroom. Including components such as the development of relational skills and the exploration of educational issues from multiple perspectives to existing teacher education programs could enhance the teacher identity of those entering the profession (Schultz & Ravitch, 2013). One suggestion given by Timostsuk and Ugaste (2010) called for an increased focus on the development of quality mentor-student teacher relationships to assist the identity development of pre-service teachers. Mentors provide a support for student teachers as they continue to develop their identity as they progress from student teacher to full-time teacher.

Factors such as family interactions, one’s own schooling experiences, and previously held beliefs about teaching and learning affect how teachers form their expectations of what constitutes a good teacher, although living up to these expectations can be cumbersome (Chong, 2011; Wilson & Deaney, 2010). Differences of opinion regarding what signifies a good teacher can lead educators to experience difficulties in the development of their teacher identity. Often, their beliefs on what it takes to be an effective teacher do not correspond to the expectations of
their colleagues or administrators, which may create tension within the school and lead to further frustration for the teacher (Anh, 2013; Pillen et al., 2013). Even when they develop a sense of the type of teacher they want to be, it is difficult to become that ideal teacher, which can lead to other challenges (Wilson & Deaney). Complications can arise as teachers grapple with diverse personal professional roles, which conflict and cause tension as teachers’ personal beliefs and values are not consistent with the professional expectations some schools set (Chong et al.; Pillen et al.). Second-career teachers must be open to constructive criticism and feedback from colleagues while still recognizing the potential impact their previous career can have in the classroom (Fry & Anderson, 2011).

The dynamic nature of teacher identity was demonstrated in Thomas and Beauchamp’s study (2011), in which participants were asked to describe their professional identities using metaphors at both the onset and conclusion of their teacher education program. The results demonstrated a recognizable shift as metaphors at the beginning focused more on guiding students and providing direction in the classroom, while the final interview centered on the student teachers themselves and the difficulties that faced during their experience. The experience of actually being in a classroom led to a change in the way the participants viewed themselves as teachers. In similar fashion, Pillen (2013) suggested that first-year teachers’ identity was influenced as they gained experience on their own and realized what it was actually like to be a teacher in their own classroom with the assumption of more non-instructional responsibilities that student teachers do not hold. Being in the so-called driver’s seat can force teachers to be exposed to numerous situations that influence their professional identity and beliefs on what roles a teacher holds (Thomas & Beauchamp). The influence of authentic teaching experience on teacher identity was also reported in Kim and Greene’s (2011) study, as
they witnessed a shift from a content-centered approach toward a more student-centered approach, as participants’ gained experience. In addition, their study demonstrated a change of focus in terms of viewing student learning as more of a process as opposed to a product.

The ability to assume multiple identities can be a source of stress for second-career teachers as they juggle the roles of teacher, spouse, and parent (Wilson & Deaney, 2010), while also attempting to integrate their first career identity into their teaching practice. Grier and Johnston’s (2012) study of STEM professionals transitioning to the classroom revealed a conflict when integrating these roles. STEM practitioners place emphasis on skills such as inquiry, experimentation, and practice through evidence gathering, while schools typically place a much higher value on test data, leading teachers to focus more on text. These professionals found that what made them esteemed in a previous career was not as valued in their new teaching role.

Summary

As schools and districts continue to face increased accountability, the need to hire and develop high quality teachers is more important than ever. One strategy being implemented by many school districts is to employ second-career teachers. These teachers bring a wealth of knowledge, skills, and experience to the classroom that can help meet the needs of students. These career changers typically transition into teaching positions that relate directly to their first career, which often places them in a secondary school setting.

Motivations for choosing teaching as a second career vary, but the majority of these teachers are intrinsically motivated. They hope to make a difference in the lives of children and be a part of something they consider to be worthwhile and rewarding. Past experiences, both positive and negative, play a role in one’s decision to enter teaching as a second career. For some, their own school experience or their child’s school experience leads them to pursue a
teaching career. Factors such as major changes in their first career or important life changes also contribute to choosing a career in teaching.

Teacher education programs that provide flexible routes into teaching have been on the rise, making it more convenient for career changers, but it is not without challenges. Career changers experience difficulties during both their coursework and practicum experience, which can often be attributed to beliefs about teaching that contrast with traditionally held expectations. In addition, second-career teacher education students face problems creating social networks with their younger, less mature classmates, often leaving them with feelings of isolation. The lack of support for these teachers during both the teacher education experience and beginning years of teaching can be discouraging because their previous career experiences are not taken into account as they seek to develop as teachers.

While second-career teachers bring a wealth of experience and skills, there are challenges that exist in their transition to the classroom. Not all first-career skills prove to be beneficial in the transition to teaching. Often, the skills are valuable but schools fail to recognize and properly utilize the skills and experiences of second-career teachers. If attended to properly, schools could take advantage of these unique professionals by addressing barriers that exist in teacher education programs, professional development, and the actual transition to the classroom. This could allow second-career teachers to effectively share their special skills with members of the faculty.

Second-career elementary school teachers have not been studied as much as their secondary school counterparts. The majority of the literature focuses on second-career teachers who are able to shift from their first career into a teaching position that allows them to teach content related to their previous career. Having an extensive amount of content knowledge that
was acquired during a first career provides a benefit for these teachers, although there are other factors needed to be successful. Elementary school teachers, however, do not have the same advantage as they are often called upon to teach multiple subjects. Their content knowledge alone is not enough to ensure their success as a classroom teacher since they must have sufficient knowledge of a variety of subjects. Further research is needed to identify the first-career skills and characteristics that make second-career elementary school teachers effective. This study sought to understand the first-career skills and experiences that transition to a successful career in elementary education.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

This collective case study explored the first-career skills and experiences that aided second-career teachers in their roles as elementary school teachers. Data collection included the results from individual interviews with teachers and principals and also from focus group discussions. Available documentation and artifacts were also collected to serve as data sources. A description of the research design, participants, and site are included in this chapter, along with the research questions, the researcher’s role, and procedures. This chapter also details the data collection and analysis procedures that were used in this study. A discussion of the trustworthiness and ethical considerations are addressed in the chapter as well.

Design

A qualitative research design was utilized, since I sought to understand the skills and experiences that help second-career teachers be effective elementary school teachers. A qualitative study allowed for an in-depth examination of the problem and experiences of the participants. A collective case study was the approach for this study. A case study design allowed the researcher to focus on a specific issue, which in this case was the utilization of the first-career skills of second-career teachers. Collective case studies explore a specific topic through the coordinated use of several case studies, each of which provides valuable data (Stake, 1995).

One of the defining features of case study research is the focus on multiple perspectives for a given context (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Patton (2002) suggested the use of a case study approach to probe participants’ understanding and perception of a given issue. The need for case studies can be attributed to the goal of understanding very complex issues. Participants may
A collective (multiple) case study was used in order to examine the issue from multiple participants. Collective case studies are utilized when no single perspective can adequately describe the given issue. As Yin (2009) acknowledged, even scientific facts take more than a single experiment into account. Typically, it is the replication of experiments using different conditions that leads to the creation of scientific fact. Collective case studies work in much the same way, as the use of multiple participants’ accounts is used to increase the understanding on a given issue. Multiple participants provide accounts of their perspective in the given context, which adds depth to the explanation of the issue (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). In this particular study, teacher participants were able to share their own first-career experiences and their teaching experiences. Because their first careers and teaching experiences varied, it was important to explore the issue from multiple participants. Principals and academic coaches were also able to provide data based on their own experiences working with second-career teachers.

**Research Questions**

This collective case study will be guided by the research questions listed below.

a. *How do the skills acquired in a first career affect second-career elementary school teachers?*

b. *What skills do participants see as essential to being an effective teacher?*

c. *How are the first-career skills and experiences of second-career teachers utilized within an elementary school setting?*
d. What challenges do second-career teachers face in applying their first-career skills in an elementary school setting?

Setting

The setting for this study was in a public school system in northeast Tennessee that typically ranked in the top 10 school systems in the state based upon Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) scores. The school system served approximately 8,000 students in grades PK-12 in eleven schools. Fifty-two percent of the students were considered economically disadvantaged, and approximately twenty-five percent of the students were minority students with the largest percentage of those being African-American and Hispanic. The school system consisted of eight elementary schools (K-4th), an intermediate school (5th-6th), a middle school (7th-8th), a high school (9th-12th), and an alternative learning center (7th-12th).

The reason this setting was chosen was the history of successful second-career teachers, as many of the schools’ teachers of the year winners were second-career teachers. The school system was also located in the same city as two major teacher education institutions, which allowed them to choose from a large pool of applicants when hiring teachers. Since this setting was a city school system, the amount of funding for teacher salaries and academic programs was significantly higher than the surrounding county school systems. The school system used in this study ranked in the top ten in the state of Tennessee for teacher salaries, which aided in attracting quality educators.

The schools used for the study were dependent upon the selection of participants through enlistment questionnaires. Three elementary schools and the intermediate school were selected for this study. The elementary schools chosen serve students in Pre-K through fourth grade, and the intermediate school houses all of the fifth and sixth grade students in the school district. The
three elementary schools were recognized as Title I schools due to their percentage of students who were classified as low socioeconomic. The intermediate school was not classified as a Title I school, which limited funding for materials and programs.

**Participants**

Purposive sampling, also known as criterion based sampling, was used to select the participants that fit a given set of criteria for inclusion in this study. This type of sampling allowed the researcher to address the key points while also providing for diversity within the sample (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The 13 participants consisted of five second-career teachers along with four school principals and four district academic coaches. A sample size of four to five typically allows the researcher to determine themes and conduct cross-case analysis (Creswell, 2013).

Enlistment questionnaires were shared with third through fifth grade teachers at the schools to gather background information. The first question asked teachers to identify if they were second-career teachers. For those who were second-career teachers, questions regarding the years of teaching experience, teacher effectiveness, the school where they teach, grade level and subject taught, and previous career details were included. Participants first met the criteria of being a second-career teacher with an overall teacher effectiveness score of a 4 or 5 (Appendix B). It should be noted that the teacher participants for this study were identified as effective based on overall evaluation data which is a composite of qualitative and quantitative measures. The qualitative component is comprised of teacher observation data, and the quantitative portion is based upon standardized testing data. After selecting teachers who met this first set of criteria, maximum variation strategies were implemented to choose participants that varied in terms of first career, grade level taught, gender, and years of teaching experience to
reduce any one-sidedness that could potentially arise (Patton, 2002). I was able to enlist one male participant and four female teacher participants. This imbalance was due to the higher number of female elementary teachers compared to males in the school system. In Tennessee, the end-of-year assessments which factor into a teacher’s effectiveness score begin in third grade. Therefore, second-career teachers in third through fifth grades who have their own student test data were given priority in the selection of participants. In addition, preference was given to second-career teachers who had been out of their first career and in the classroom for less than ten years since these teachers were less removed from their first career undergraduate experience and work experience.

**Procedures**

The first step in the research process was to gain approval from Liberty University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). See Appendix A for IRB approval. Once the IRB approved the proposal, contact was made with the participating school system to take care of any paperwork and documentation that was needed to be completed to conduct research in the schools. Potential participants were then identified during the collection and analysis of the enlistment questionnaires. Participants needed to fit the criteria of being a second-career elementary school teacher with a teacher effectiveness score of a 4 or 5, preferably with ten years or less of experience in the education field. Once a pool of participants was identified, the selection of the final participants was chosen to include variation in terms of first career, years of teaching experience, teaching site, gender, and age. The school principals of the participants were also notified of the selection of one of their teachers for inclusion in the study. Consent forms (Appendix C) were distributed to the participants before data collection began, and initial meetings were arranged with the participants to describe the study in greater detail and answer
any questions they had. A pilot study was conducted using two teacher participants and one principal from the school where I worked as a way to fine-tune the interview questions for teachers and principals.

**The Researcher’s Role**

In addressing the success of students, the most important factor is that of the teacher. Professional development activities and teacher education programs are the primary means of educating and improving practicing educators. I have taken an increased interest in these areas as I have gained more experience in my profession. At the time of the study, I served as the assistant principal for two Title 1 elementary schools in the district, and one of the primary tasks was to identify and improve professional development opportunities for teachers. I had also taught in multiple schools and grade levels during my career, with the majority of my experience being at the elementary level.

Participants were not chosen from the two schools where I served as the assistant principal, thus excluding teachers with whom I had a direct relationship in a supervisory capacity. My classroom observations factored into teacher effectiveness scores, so teachers did not need to feel that their participation or nonparticipation would impact their evaluation data. Having taught several different grade levels and subjects in this school system, I was familiar with the participants selected for this study, but had never worked with any in a supervisory role.

As the researcher, I served as the human instrument for this study. I sought to identify the first-career skills and experiences that played a role in the effectiveness of second-career elementary school teachers. The researcher’s role was to conduct interviews with teachers and principals and lead the focus group consisting of the district’s curriculum coaches. Available
documents and artifacts were also collected over the course of this study. In addition, the
analysis of the collected data from the interviews and artifacts was performed by the researcher.

Data Collection

Several forms of data collection were utilized to remain consistent with the characteristics
of case study research (Yin, 2009). The majority of the data was collected through individual
interviews and a focus group with stakeholders as well as through available documents such as
lesson plans and reflective journals. The interview questions are provided in Appendix D-F. A
description of each data collection method is included in this section.

Pilot Study

As a way to fine-tune the interview questions and observation protocol, a pilot study was
conducted. Yin (2009) recommends using a pilot study as a way to clarify any questions the
researcher may have regarding the design of the study. The pilot study was conducted at the
school where I work because of the accessibility to the site and because of the relationships that
had already been developed between the participants and the researcher. Since we had
developed trusting relationships, these participants felt free to be transparent and honest with
their feedback regarding the clarity of questions and participant expectations. Two second-
career teachers and a principal were selected for the pilot study. The two second-career teachers
went through the individual interview process and provided feedback regarding the clarity of the
questions. The principal participated in an individual interview that previewed the interview
questions for principals and the focus group. Feedback from all participants was used to retool
any parts of the design that needed modification.
Focus Group Interview

A focus group consisting of district curriculum coaches was formed to discuss skills and qualities that represented an effective teacher and to share experiences of second-career teachers who work in their particular schools. The focus group was conducted face-to-face in a conference room after school. The participants served as curriculum coaches in the same district and had a working relationship, which created a level of familiarity and comfort within the group. This practice allowed me to collect data from several participants at one time and gave me a preliminary idea of how these participants’ perspectives compared and contrasted (Patton, 2002).

Creswell (2013) recommends the use of focus groups because they can prove beneficial by allowing for the exchange of ideas between participants. In addition to their original responses to questions, participants can add to the responses of others, often providing greater detail (Patton). This acted as a brainstorming session prior to conducting individual, in-depth interviews with school principals. The interviews were audio recorded to allow for thorough review, and the researcher transcribed the recordings. The questions that were used for the focus group are found below and in Appendix D.

Focus Group Questions

1. Please tell me a little about yourself and your educational philosophy.

2. Describe the skills and qualities of an effective teacher.

3. How would you describe the readiness of teachers entering the profession?

4. What shortcomings, if any, do you see in teacher education programs and professional development?

5. How would you describe your experiences working with second-career teachers?
6. What differences, if any, do you see in the skill set of second-career teachers compared to first-career teachers?

7. How, if at all, do you utilize the unique skills of second-career teachers?

8. What are the benefits, if any, to having second-career teachers employed at your school?

9. What challenges, if any, exist in the hiring and retaining of second-career teachers?

**Interviews with Principals**

Once second-career teacher participants were chosen, I conducted in-depth, individual interviews with their principals to explore specific data for each teacher participant (Yin, 2009). A semi-structured interview approach was used to allow flexibility in terms of questioning. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by an outside party and the researcher. The pilot study gave me a good idea of how long each interview would take, and this was shared with the principals prior to interviews. The interview questions listed below and in Appendix E were piloted with an elementary principal who was not participating in the study to ensure that the questions were clear and concise.

**Interview Questions for Principals**

1.) Please tell me a little about yourself and your educational philosophy (i.e.- age, gender, race, years in education, years in administration, and general beliefs about education).

2.) What characteristics do you look for when hiring a teacher?

3.) Describe the skills and qualities that make this particular teacher (teacher name inserted in place of particular teacher) effective.

4.) How does this teacher utilize these particular skills in the school?
5.) How would you describe this teacher’s professional growth during the time you have worked together?

6.) Which of the teacher’s strengths and skills would you relate to first-career experiences?

7.) How do this person’s first-career skills and experiences affect classroom instruction?

8.) What skills make this teacher different from others in your school?

9.) What challenges, if any, does this teacher experience?

**Interviews with Teachers**

Second-career teachers provided the richest data in terms of the skills and experiences from their first career. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each second-career teacher, audio recorded, and transcribed by an outside party and the researcher. This approach provided a framework to work with but also opened up opportunities for follow-up questions during the process that were specific to the teachers’ first-career experiences and education. After completing the pilot study with two nonparticipating teachers, I was able to approximate how long each interview would take and communicated this to the participants. Teachers were able to draw from their undergraduate coursework and work experience during the interview process. The ability to differentiate between skills that were taught explicitly during their program and learned on the job provided important data. The interview questions listed below and in Appendix F provide an outline for the teacher interviews.

**Interview Questions for Second-Career Teachers**

1.) Tell me about yourself (i.e. age, gender, teaching position, experience, previous career, family, hobbies, etc.).

2.) Describe the characteristics and skills of an effective teacher.
3.) What are your strengths as a teacher?

4.) What are your shortcomings as a teacher?

5.) What factors influenced your career change to elementary education?

6.) How would you describe your teacher education experience?

7.) What challenges, if any, did you face during your teacher education training?

8.) How has your first-career experience influenced you as a teacher?

9.) Describe how you utilize skills in the classroom that were developed in your first-career work experience and coursework.

10.) What challenges, if any, have you faced as a second-career teacher?

11.) Describe the characteristics of a positive professional learning experience.

12.) Describe the characteristics of a negative professional learning experience.

13.) How, if at all, have you grown as a teacher during your time in the classroom?

**Artifacts**

I collected several documents as part of the data collection procedures (Yin, 2009).

“Documents prove valuable not only because of what can be learned directly from them but also as stimulus for paths of inquiry that can be pursued only through direct observation and interviewing” (Patton, 2002, p. 294). Teacher lessons plans were collected weekly via email or school mail. The researcher carefully examined the plans and noted strategies and procedures related to the participant’s first career. Participants were asked to maintain a journal to reflect on daily/weekly practices that were connected to their first career.

**Data Analysis**

Triangulation of the data was accomplished by using data collected from individual interviews, the focus group, and the analysis of artifacts. Transcription of interview data was
completed by an outside party, as well as the researcher. Preliminary steps such as thorough reading and review of the transcriptions were performed to provide an in-depth description of each case. Data was then categorized into themes or patterns for each case. Data were reported by research question, themes, and through the comparing of cases.

**Preliminary Analysis**

Interview transcriptions, focus group transcriptions, and other available artifacts were reviewed multiple times in order to provide a big picture of the data before breaking it into distinct parts for further analysis (Agar, 1980). Memoing and note taking during interviews allowed me to identify some developing themes and key ideas throughout the data collection process. Stake (1995) recommends preparing a written account of the interview within a few hours of its completing to capitalize on initial impressions. More in-depth investigations were also performed as the transcriptions become available. As recommended by Grbich (2007), I engaged in this process each time I collected data as it was considered an ongoing process in which interaction with the data allowed me to immerse myself in the research. This process revealed emerging concepts and issues that provided direction with future data collection. After three to five interviews, the developing issues detected during memoing and note taking were used to identify potential themes. This step in the data analysis process ensured a holistic view of each case by uncovering shortcomings and gaps in the existing data.

**Coding**

Open coding and axial coding were utilized in the data analysis procedures for this case study. The coding process involves breaking down the collected data into smaller categories of information that will later be used to identify major themes. Creswell (2013), suggests beginning with a short list of codes before expanding the number of codes as data are thoroughly reviewed.
Open coding allowed for the division of the data into manageable parts as I progressed in the data analysis process. By engaging in the preliminary steps described in the section above, open coding took into account the emerging themes from each set of data that were collected and analyzed after every three to five interviews. Note cards were used to write phrases, ideas, and reflections from each set of data, which were then organized into themes.

After the completion of open coding, I utilized axial coding to focus on one major theme from the open coding process. Creswell (2013) refers to this as the core phenomenon. After identifying the core phenomenon, I revisited the data to create categories that related to this central idea (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The core phenomenon was then linked to the different sub-themes and sub-categories that had been a factor (Grbich, 2007).

Cross-case Synthesis

Yin (2009) discusses the importance of using cross-case synthesis in multiple, or collective, case studies. Individual cases were analyzed before conducting an examination of the similarities and differences between cases in the study. In order to provide a more comprehensive and holistic explanation of the issue, multiple cases were explored. While these cases had the potential to reveal several differences, the similarities between cases allowed me to make connections and identify themes regarding the types of first-career skills and experiences that led to effective teaching and learning (Patton, 2002; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

Naturalistic Generalizations

Naturalistic generalizations were also used to analyze the data. Naturalistic generalizations allow researchers to draw conclusions based on personal engagement or vicarious experiences that are so well-developed that they lead the researchers to feel as if they actually experienced the event. The rich, detailed descriptions of each case allow readers to feel
immersed in the case and provide the foundation for any generalizations that are made (Stake, 1995). Generalization of the study’s context to other settings by analyzing similarities between cases will hopefully prove useful when discussing the implications this study may potentially offer (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness was established in multiple ways. First, the triangulation of data was achieved by using a focus group, teacher interviews, principal interviews, and available artifacts. Member checking was used to ensure accuracy in the presentation of the cases as participants had the opportunity to review the findings. Peer review, reflexivity, and the use of rich, thick description in the case analysis were also used to confirm trustworthiness. A brief description of each method is provided in this section.

**Triangulation of Data**

Triangulation of data compares multiple data sources to examine whether the same themes continue to persist (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). The corroboration of multiple data sources will also address concerns regarding construct validity (Yin, 2009). The findings from each of the data sources (focus group, teacher interviews, principal interviews, and available documentation such as lesson plans and reflective journals) were compared to ensure reliability and validity from the different sources.

**Member Checking**

Participants were granted access to the preliminary findings from the research. Patton (2002) suggests sharing the preliminary analyses with the participants as opposed to the transcripts or documents from the raw data. This allowed the participants to assess the accuracy of the reports (Stake, 1995). Participants were given the opportunity to clarify any
misconceptions as well as fill in any gaps that were overlooked during the data collection and analysis process.

**Peer Review**

The peer review process, often referred to as peer debriefing, enlisted the assistance of an outside party to increase validity. The peer’s responsibility was two-fold. First, she acted as a sounding board for me to discuss elements of the study. Secondly, she questioned me regarding different parts of the study, leading me to reflect continually on the steps in my research. It was imperative that this person felt free to be completely honest, ask tough questions, and clear up any misunderstanding or confusing sections of the study (Patton, 2002).

**Reflexivity**

Reflexivity was used to clarify any of my own biases that may have influenced my research. Any assumptions that I may have held that would have impacted the study would have been clearly stated. A description of my background and experience that related to the topic was shared with the reader (Creswell, 2013). The use of multiple data sources minimized any bias that I had. Since I was the primary instrument of data collection, it was imperative that I constantly reflected upon the data and reported any possible biases that could have potentially impacted my study (Patton, 2002). The use of a reflective journal to provide justification for any changes made during the study was maintained throughout the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

**Rich, Thick Description**

Given the aim of my research, the use of rich, thick descriptions in the analysis of each case was essential. By providing highly detailed descriptions from each case, including direct quotations from participants, the reader should be able to make connections and generalizations
between the different cases (Stake, 1995). As I explored the backgrounds, skills, and experiences of teachers from different first careers, it was important that they be described vividly to connect themes that relate to my central research question. Shared characteristics between cases can be more easily identified by using a rich, thick description of each case.

**Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations were taken into account in this study. IRB approval was granted before I engaged in any part of my research. Upon receiving IRB approval, contact was made with the specified school district to detail the study and gain permission to utilize the site and participants. Once I gained consent from the central office supervisor, I visited each school to outline the study for the participants.

Prior to conducting my research, I communicated the purpose of this study and the responsibilities of the participants. Consent forms (Appendix C) were obtained from each participant in the study. Extra time and effort were required from each participant through the participation in interviews, maintaining of journals, and sharing of lesson plans and other documents, so reciprocity of time was addressed (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). As recommended by Creswell (2013), I compensated the participants in an appropriate manner in exchange for their time and assistance with my study.

Research questions three and four had the potential to be uncomfortable for the participants as they addressed their role as a second-career teacher in their school. Research question three asked participants to share how their skills were utilized within the school, and question four probed into the challenges they faced in implementing their first-career skills. There could have been a sense of uneasiness regarding these questions if the teacher participants...
had been overly critical of the way they were utilized. Therefore, pseudonyms were used to represent the participants and sites for the study.

To minimize any ethical issues, all audio recordings, interview transcriptions, reflective journals, and documents were locked in a safe, and all computer files were password protected. A list of the pseudonyms and corresponding participant names were locked in a separate location. Participants were told that they could drop out of the study at any time, and any previously collected data from that participant would be destroyed immediately (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2009).

**Summary**

This chapter discussed the qualitative research design for this study, as well as the research questions, setting, participants, and procedures. The data collection procedures were examined and included lists of the questions to be asked during interviews. The data analysis methods were shared along with the steps that were followed to ensure trustworthiness throughout the study. The ethical considerations that were employed over the course of this study were also discussed. The following chapter presents the findings from the study.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings and data analysis of this study. This chapter provides a description of each participant, research question analysis, a discussion of the themes, and a cross-case analysis. The data collection methods involved a focus group, individual interviews, and available artifacts in the form of lesson plans and reflective journals that were maintained by the second-career teacher participants in this study. The purpose of this study was to understand how first-career skills were utilized by highly effective second-career elementary school teachers in northeast Tennessee. Teacher participants were identified as highly effective by their overall teacher effectiveness score, which consisted of observation data and standardized test scores. Second-career teachers have accrued skills and experiences during a previous career that can potentially impact their success as an elementary school teacher. Identifying the skills that are associated with effective teaching practice as well as examining the first-career skills that transition to an elementary setting can assist administrators in the hiring of new teachers and provide avenues for professional growth.

The primary research question that guided this study was:

RQ #1: How do the skills acquired in a first career affect second-career elementary school teachers?

Additionally, the following research questions provided insight into the factors that contributed to effective teaching and the experiences of second-career teachers in the elementary school setting.

RQ #2: What skills do participants see as essential to being an effective teacher?
RQ #3: How are the first-career skills and experiences of second-career teachers utilized within an elementary school setting?

RQ #4: What challenges do second-career teachers face in applying their first-career skills in an elementary school setting?

Participants

The study enlisted participants from four separate elementary schools in the Apple School District (pseudonym) in northeast Tennessee. Valley Elementary (pseudonym), Ridgecrest Elementary (pseudonym), and Chestoa Elementary (pseudonym) were recognized as Title I schools, while Baymont Elementary (pseudonym) did not have Title I status. In all, 13 participants were part of the data collection process. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of all participants. One second-career teacher and one administrator were selected from each of the schools, with the exception of Baymont Elementary, which had two second-career teacher participants. Four district academic coaches also participated in a focus group as part of the data collection process. Administrators participated in an individual interview. The second-career teachers first completed an initial questionnaire that detailed their first-career experience, previous teaching experience, and current teaching status. Upon selection for the study, second-career teachers took part in an individual interview, submitted lesson plans for analysis, and maintained a reflective journal outlining their integration of first-career skills throughout the week in the classroom.

All participants were assigned a pseudonym for the purpose of maintaining confidentiality for this study. A description of each participant is included below, beginning with the second-career teachers, followed by the administrators, and concluding with the academic coaches. The background information for the second-career teacher participants is
more detailed because they provide a description of their first career, undergraduate experience, motivations for teaching, and pathways to their current teaching position. Table 1 provides an overview of the participants.

Table 1

Participant Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Common Referral in Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Pseudonym)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth Smith</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Baymont</td>
<td>Beth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brittney Towns</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Baymont</td>
<td>Brittney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greg Barnes</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Baymont</td>
<td>Principal Barnes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caroline South</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Chestoa</td>
<td>Caroline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laiken Church</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Chestoa</td>
<td>Dr. Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhonda Johnson</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Ridgecrest</td>
<td>Rhonda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makayla Rhodes</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Ridgecrest</td>
<td>Dr. Rhodes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vincent Woods</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Valley</td>
<td>Vincent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leslie Vines</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Valley</td>
<td>Dr. Vines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donna Gambrell</td>
<td>Literacy Coach</td>
<td>District-wide</td>
<td>Donna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane Kiser</td>
<td>Math Coach</td>
<td>District-wide</td>
<td>Diane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destiny Rice</td>
<td>Literacy Coach</td>
<td>District-wide</td>
<td>Destiny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daphne Rose</td>
<td>Literacy Coach</td>
<td>District-wide</td>
<td>Daphne</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rhonda Johnson

Rhonda earned her undergraduate degree in communications and office management. After earning her degree, she accepted a job as a credit department manager for a local business in western North Carolina. Her major responsibilities included supervising a department of eleven employees and working directly with customers regarding credit and collections. After five years, the company was acquired by a larger company in a neighboring state, resulting in major changes to her responsibilities. She began traveling for the company and setting up new software systems as part of the company’s technology team. When the company closed their local branch, she became the manager of a medical office for two years where her primary responsibilities involved filing insurance, coding medical procedures, and overseeing the daily function of the office staff. Rhonda shared that her previous experiences taught her a great deal about corporate America.

Rhonda had earned her teaching certificate while working in her first management position but had not felt it was the right time to pursue a teaching position. One major factor in her decision to delay applying for teaching positions was a negative student teaching experience, which led her to question her desire to become a teacher. In addition, she had recently gotten married and started a family, adding to her hesitancy to begin work in a new profession. A change in her husband’s employment necessitated a move to Tennessee, at which time Rhonda decided to pursue a teaching career.

Typically, attaining licensure in a different state can be a tedious, cumbersome process. Rhonda’s license and teaching credentials had expired in North Carolina, so she was expecting the licensure process in Tennessee to be extremely difficult. She was first told that she would have to take extra classes to earn her teaching license in the state. Rhonda wrote the state’s
education department asking for a waiver so that she could begin teaching while taking the prescribed classes. Much to her amazement, her application was approved, and she was granted a professional teaching license that allowed her to seek full-time teaching positions.

Rhonda worked as a kindergarten teaching assistant for one year before earning a full-time teaching position in first grade, which she held for four years. Next, she had one-year stints in third and fourth grades before spending three years in second grade. Her husband’s job once again led them to relocate, so she was in her first year with the Apple School District, teaching fourth grade English/Language Arts and Social Studies at Ridgecrest Elementary School at the time of the study.

Beth Smith

Beth held a bachelor’s degree in public relations and communications. After graduating from college, she worked at Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) first as a secretary to get her foot in the door but quickly moved into a position as an accounts manager in the communications and procurement division. One of her major responsibilities involved providing communication between the information technology (IT) department and the business department of the company. She helped ensure that the IT department’s policies and procedures met the needs of the workers on the business end. The organization housed nuclear facilities so there was a high degree of standardization needed to meet regulations set forth by the government. Beth referred to herself as the go-between for the IT department and communications and procurement division. She was often responsible for drafting press release statements that detailed the company’s practices and stances on certain issues as well as any changes taking place. When one division faced challenges that could affect the other division, Beth was expected to be a part
of the process to develop solutions for the challenges. She served in this role for approximately five years.

Beth’s husband’s job caused the family to relocate to the Great Lakes area. At that time, she chose to be a stay-at-home mom to take care of her children and ease their transition to a new environment. During this time, she spent more time in her children’s school volunteering in the classrooms and took on different roles with the PTA. She was able to use her communications background as she took over the task of creating the school newsletter and implementing new forms of parent communication for the school. It was at this time that Beth began to develop a great appreciation for the work that teachers do and the impact they have on students’ lives.

Beth’s husband’s job once again led them to move, and she found herself at a crossroads. Her children were getting older and she started questioning what she would do once they were in college. The area she had moved to had little to offer in the way of her communications and public relations career. She decided to go back to school to pursue a teaching degree. Originally, she wanted to teach high school history but was steered toward the middle grades (fourth through eighth grades) by some of her advisors mainly because they felt it would be easier for someone to get a job in the middle grades than high school. She earned her master’s degree in teaching in a program geared toward non-traditional students who had worked in other professions prior to pursuing a teaching career.

Beth completed her student teaching at Baymont Elementary School and earned a full-time teaching position there upon graduation. She raved about her student teaching experience and was actually given the opportunity to serve as a tutor during her planning period. Beth worked with a number of teachers in this role. Teachers would send struggling students to her with the expectation that she would help fill in the gaps with their learning. This required her to
be able to address individual student needs and communicate progress to the student, teacher, and parent. At the conclusion of the school year, she was hired to teach fifth grade Science and Social Studies. At the time of this study, she was in her fourth year of teaching, all of which had been in fifth grade Science and Social Studies.

**Caroline South**

Caroline earned both a bachelor’s degree and master’s degree in social work. Her master’s degree specialty was in understanding family systems and how the systems affected family members, which she believed had served her well as a teacher. She spent a total of 12 years as a social worker, working primarily in the area of outpatient dialysis and transplantation. The majority of her interactions were with families dealing with a chronic illness of a family member. This particular job required her to guide families through very difficult experiences, many of which dealt with death. She shared that even though people in that profession are taught to set boundaries and not get too close with the clients, she had a very difficult time doing so. Often times, she would see families three times a week amidst trying to help the ill person die as comfortably as possible and be there for the families as they experienced loss. The success stories were few since so many of her clients did not qualify for transplantation, so they were just trying to live as long and as peacefully as they could. For obvious reasons, this profession took a toll on Caroline.

It was around this time that her children were starting school. She had been encouraged by others to make sure she was involved and knew what was going on in her children’s school. Her family was in a position where she could stay home and not work, so she began volunteering at the school. Her child’s teacher planted the seed for Caroline to think about becoming a teacher by encouraging her to go back to school. After much prayer, Caroline enrolled in a
Master of Arts in Teaching program to earn her teaching degree. She shared that she benefited greatly from the diversity of her cohort, which was made up of both first-career teachers and future second-career teachers. The cohort members who were already teaching were able to share real classroom experiences. She also profited from having members who were entering the program from a first career just as she was. Being able to go through the program with others who were in a similar position provided encouragement and confidence during the teacher education program.

Caroline was in her eighth year of teaching at the time of this study. She began her teaching career at Chestoa Elementary and taught fifth grade there for three years before a grade level realignment moved fifth grade students and teachers to an intermediate school for fifth and sixth grades. Mrs. South taught fifth grade English/Language Arts for three years before transferring back to Chestoa Elementary where she had taught the past two years. In her first year back, she was assigned to teach a third grade self-contained class, which meant she was responsible for teaching all of the core academic subjects to her class. A spot opened up in fourth grade the following school year and she requested to move primarily because she had built strong relationships with a couple of particularly challenging students. She believed that the rapport she had built with those students and parents would be beneficial to all involved. She loved teaching but expressed an interest in becoming a school guidance counselor, which would be a nice blend of her first and second careers.

**Brittney Towns**

Brittney earned her undergraduate degree with a major in interior design and a minor in music and performing arts. She worked in the field of interior design for approximately two and a half years. Brittney worked with a variety of clients, both individuals and companies, to meet
their design needs. This career required her to research popular trends in design and to stay current in her profession. Brittney enjoyed the creative aspect of her job and developing designs for her clients. On the negative side, one aspect of her first career that she did not enjoy was selling. She commented that at the age of 23, she did not feel her personality was suited for the selling mindset. Part of this could be attributed to a lack of confidence she had as well as her desire to prepare the perfect design for each client.

After two and a half years of working in the field of interior design, she was offered a job at a church as a financial secretary where she primarily handled the bookkeeping duties. During the time she worked at the church, she began working with children in the children’s choir and for the first time in her life, she felt like she was connecting with kids and enjoying it. This was very surprising to her because she had not previously had a desire to work with young children. In fact, she shared that she had never even intended to have children of her own. It was during this experience where she used her music education that she felt the desire to teach. While in high school, she had contemplated being a music teacher, but had been discouraged by others due to the exclusive nature of that type of teaching position. After working with the young children in the choir, she chose to pursue a teaching position in elementary education.

Brittney enrolled in a master’s program to earn her teaching degree. She described her teacher education experience as being nothing but positive. She felt the coursework and practicum experiences were very worthwhile and prepared her well. Brittney worked as an interim for part of a year then taught fifth grade for three years at another school in the district. After a district realignment, Brittney was transferred to Baymont Elementary where she taught 5th grade English/Language Arts, giving her a total of eight years of experience with the Apple
School District. During this time, she had earned a reputation for being one of the premier teachers in the district and was often called upon to assume leadership roles at the school level.

Vincent Woods

Vincent was in his fourth year of teaching at the time of this study, all of which had been at Valley Elementary School. His undergraduate degree was in Geography with a focus in Urban Planning and Cartography. Vincent’s first career experience took on many forms. He worked as a city planner in a city of approximately 200,000 residents, overseeing improvement projects during his time there and regularly scheduled maintenance initiatives. He also performed other responsibilities such as drawing maps, working on the city’s website, and street design. Vincent later took a job with an environmental consulting firm where he was able to utilize several of the skills he had performed as a city planner. With each role, he found himself gauging the community’s opinions on a multitude of issues, which allowed him to interact with people from diverse backgrounds and see things from different perspectives.

Because Vincent’s wife was also a teacher, he often volunteered in her classroom while he was working in his first career so he got a first-hand look at the classroom. He later became a substitute teacher and behavior modification teacher in the school district. These experiences allowed him to have a more realistic perspective of what being a teacher would be like, which served him well when he enrolled in an alternative teacher licensure program. Vincent added on the master’s track, so he was able to earn his master’s degree while he was becoming certified to teach.

Vincent taught in first grade for one year, and the rest of his teaching career was in fourth grade. He taught in a self-contained classroom for one year where he was responsible for teaching all subjects. During the other two years he taught fourth grade, he was assigned to
teach math, science, and social studies, which tied in with his first career in terms of the content. He was selected to serve as the vice president of the school leadership team. Vincent had also assumed the crossing guard duties at the school during afternoon dismissal. Valley Elementary School’s principal commented on how effective he performed this particular duty with regards to maintaining traffic flow and student safety, a strength she attributed to his previous work in city planning.

**Leslie Vines**

Leslie Vines was serving in her third year as the principal of Valley Elementary. Prior to becoming the principal at Valley, she served as an assistant principal at a middle school in the district. Before coming to Apple School District, Dr. Vines served as an elementary school teacher and then as a district-wide curriculum coach in a neighboring system. She shared that she had worked with several second-career teachers in each of her positions. Leslie held a bachelor’s degree in elementary education and a master’s degree and a doctorate in educational leadership.

**Greg Barnes**

Greg Barnes was in his second year as principal of Baymont Elementary School. He had served as an assistant principal and principal in two other districts during his career. Principal Barnes worked as an elementary school teacher, middle school teacher, and middle school basketball coach before beginning his career in administration. He had undergraduate degrees in elementary education and health/physical education and a master’s degree in educational leadership.
Laiken Church

Laiken Church began her career as a French teacher at the high school and elementary level. She also spent one year teaching English and another year teaching fifth and sixth grade social studies. She majored in French for her undergraduate degree and then later earned her master’s and doctorate in educational administration and supervision. Dr. Church worked as an assistant principal at two of the district’s elementary schools before becoming the principal at Chestoa Elementary School. She had served as Chestoa’s principal for three years at the time of the study.

Makayla Rhodes

Dr. Rhodes was serving as the principal at Ridgecrest Elementary School. She was in her seventh year as principal at the time of the study. Prior to becoming the principal at Ridgecrest, she served as a teacher and the curriculum specialist at the school. Over the course of her almost thirty years in education, she had taught in three different states and in every grade from Pre-K to fifth grade. She held a bachelor’s degree in elementary education, a master’s degree in early childhood reading, and a doctorate in educational administration.

Donna Gambrell

Donna Gambrell served as a district-wide literacy coach for third and fourth grades at the six Title I schools in the Apple School District. She had held this position for the past six years after serving as a reading interventionist and classroom teacher at one of the district’s elementary schools. Mrs. Gambrell’s primary responsibilities included working with classroom teachers to improve literacy instruction, conducting professional development sessions, and curriculum pacing for the school district.
Diane Kiser

Diane Kiser was the district math coach for grades K-8 and served in five of the district’s schools in this capacity. The majority of her teaching experience was at the high school level prior to accepting the position of math coach. She also taught graduate level math courses at a local university. Mrs. Kiser’s primary duties included working with teachers to improve math instruction, conducting professional development activities, and curriculum pacing for the school district.

Destiny Rice

Destiny Rice was the K-4 literacy coach at four of the district’s elementary schools. She had served as a school level reading coach and classroom teacher over the course of her career. Destiny taught courses in reading instruction at a local university. Her primary responsibilities in her position as a reading coach included working with teachers to improve literacy instruction, organizing reading groups for teachers, coordinating district formative assessments, conducting professional development sessions, and curriculum pacing.

Daphne Rose

Daphne Rose served as the literacy coach for grades fifth through eighth in the school district. Mrs. Rose taught seventh and eighth grade English/Language Arts before taking on the role of literacy coach. She played a major role in the one-to-one laptop initiative taking place at Baymont Elementary School in the fifth grade English/Language Arts classrooms. Mrs. Rose also worked with teachers to improve literacy instruction, conduct system wide trainings, develop formative assessments, and map the curriculum guides.
Results

Research Question Analysis

Data collected from the participants’ responses to interview questions and the analysis of reflective journals and lesson plans were used to answer each of the research questions that guided this study. Research Question 1 asked participants to respond to how first-career skills affected second-career elementary school teachers. Question 2 asked participants to discuss the skills they deemed vital to being an effective elementary school teacher. Research Question 3 probed participants’ views on how first-career skills and experiences were utilized in the elementary school setting. Question 4 examined the challenges that second-career teachers faced in applying their first-career skills in the elementary school setting.

Research question 1: How do the skills acquired in a first career affect second-career elementary school teachers?

Participants cited a multitude of first-career skills and qualities that affect second-career elementary school teachers and their effectiveness. Teacher participants’ responses provided data from the perspective of a second-career teacher. Principal participants and academic coaches were asked to compare the skills of second-career teachers in this study to other teachers in the schools. They also had the opportunity to share experiences they had working with other second-career teachers to provide a greater perspective. The skills described during data collection have been sorted into five different categories. The five major categories for the data were general professional skills, organizational skills, communication skills, thinking skills, and content knowledge. A discussion of each of these is included in this section. As is the case throughout this document, all participant names and locations discussed in the findings are represented as pseudonyms.
**General professional skills.** Participants from each of the three groups (teachers, administrators, curriculum coaches) described the presence of general professional skills as a major benefit in the transition to teaching. In fact, this was the area the school administrators group emphasized the most. They appreciated the fact that second-career teachers typically have no issues with attendance or being punctual. As principal Greg Barnes stated,

> Our second-career teachers know what it means to be a professional. They understand that they are expected to be at work on time and ready to perform their duties. I’ve had some experiences with first-career teachers where it’s the first job they’ve ever had. They are just getting accustomed to getting up and going to a job. With my second-career teachers, I never have to worry if they’re doing what they are supposed to be doing.

In a first career, pay was often contingent upon being at work. For careers in which employees are paid by the hour, being late or absent negatively impacts the amount of pay received. Those working in performance-based positions that include earning commission based on sales figures are in a similar situation as missing work often results in a reduction in pay. That mindset has carried over for many second-career teachers, as has the presence of a strong work ethic.

The Apple School District did not employ a performance-based pay scale at the time of this study. Teacher salaries were based on years of experience and degrees held. All of the second-career teacher participants in this study shared that their previous profession utilized performance-based pay and evaluations. Despite the fact that the quality of their work did not directly impact their pay, administrators in this study stated that their second-career teachers possessed an inner drive that would typically be found in performance-based careers. These
teachers did not view teaching as a profession in which they worked eight hours and then went home. They were constantly coming in early and working late, putting in the kind of hours often associated with more prestigious careers. As Laiken Church stated, “The second-career teachers that I have in this school stay until they get the job done, whether it’s four-thirty or six-thirty, and even then they end up taking more work home because they want everything to be done right.”

Second-career teachers’ desire to learn and be in a state of continuous improvement was another characteristic cited by participants. The fact that these teachers were open to feedback and willing to learn and grow was attributed to their first careers. As Vincent Woods shared, “I was expected to always be looking for ways to do my job better. Even in my annual performance review, I was supposed to tell them how I was working to improve.” This mindset carried over for second-career teachers. The administrators in this study noted that the second-career teachers they worked with often show more initiative than first-career teachers regarding learning and growing as a teacher. Their desire to learn was also evident to the academic coaches during curriculum meetings as the second-career teachers were willing to ask questions and assume leadership roles at the school or district level. “A lot of the second-career teachers I work with are the ones who are constantly asking me for better ideas on how to do things. They want to work together with me and find the best ways to do things. They’re asking for books to read that will help them,” Destiny Rice shared.

Several of the participants in this study also mentioned the need to stay current in their first career as a factor that had transitioned to their teaching role. For example, Brittney Towns referred to her first career in interior design and how she was expected to research and be aware of the newest trends. She, along with the other second-career teachers in the study, expressed their willingness to adapt to new strategies and initiatives as positive characteristics that were
developed in a first career. According to Principal Barnes, second-career teachers have had work experiences that first-career teachers have not been exposed to. He shared,

> They already know that there are different approaches to situations or different ways to do things. For someone fresh out of college coming into the classroom, they’re often locked in to thinking there’s only one way to do things, which can be difficult for me as an administrator when we have to implement change.

Administrators described a difference in the calmness and poise of second-career teachers that they attributed to having first-career experience. Dr. Rhodes discussed Rhonda’s ability to remain poised during intense meetings and conversations with parents and students, a quality she believed first-career teachers struggled with because those types of conversations were typically reserved for the mentor teacher during a practicum experience. She mentioned that the student teaching experience may expose student teachers to these types of incidents, but they typically would not be the one to navigate these difficult conversations. They considered second-career teachers to be better equipped to deal with stress and the demands of teaching.

Oftentimes, a first career required the workers to maintain a high degree of flexibility, which was a skill that was greatly needed in teaching because of the many factors that were out of a teacher’s control. Changes to curriculum, testing, and evaluations required teachers to adapt and maintain a positive attitude to effectively perform their teaching responsibilities. Principal Barnes cited Brittney’s willingness to adapt to a new district laptop initiative that was being implemented in fifth grade ELA classrooms. Teachers were being asked to shift their thinking, planning, and teaching to accommodate this one-one-one laptop initiative. He believed that Brittney’s attitude toward the change and her willingness to be flexible actually put other teachers at ease with this change. Brittney had shared that her first career required her to stay
Principal Barnes shared that other teachers were not reluctant to this change but they did exhibit a greater level of anxiety than Brittney and another second-career teacher in the grade level. It was the leadership of these two teachers that helped get the one-to-one program off the ground and running, according to Principal Barnes.

**Organizational skills.** Participants cited organization as one of the essential characteristics to being an effective teacher. Organizational skills took on many forms during the data collection process. One aspect of organization involved being an exceptional planner and keeping up with documentation. This entailed developing high-quality lesson plans that addressed the given curriculum standards for a particular lesson and being prepared to carry out that plan. Destiny mentioned the importance of organization in setting up reading groups and maintaining student progress records. This required frequent monitoring and modifying, characteristics often associated with manufacturing and business careers. Even though these record-keeping practices and the planning component did not take place during the time students were in the classroom, they were an integral part of effective teaching practice.

All of the second-career teacher participants cited the importance of organization in their previous careers, even though Vincent admitted that he often struggled in this area and it was often cited as an area for improvement on his annual reviews. In a similar fashion to teaching, a tremendous amount of preparation was required in order to carry out the major responsibilities of the first career. Rhonda Johnson shared that she wanted to be able to focus on her employees during the time they were there and spend time “in the trenches” with them. In order to do this, she would need to complete certain tasks such as paperwork and documentation before the work day began so she could be prepared to best manage the office. For Brittney, it was imperative
that she researched and developed designs prior to meeting with clients. The need to be prepared and organized carried over to teaching.

Teachers assumed so many roles that it was imperative that they were organized in order to best perform each of their duties. Between lesson planning, teaching, parent communication, serving on committees, and a plethora of other tasks, it could be difficult for teachers to keep up with everything. The ability to multitask and wear many different hats was something that each of the second-career teachers in this study were accustomed to, and it helped to ease their transition to the classroom even though most of them were surprised at how many roles they would assume as a teacher.

While each of their responsibilities was important, the need to prioritize and focus on the major issues was another component of organization that was cited by participants. Participants noted that their first careers often required them to meet deadlines regularly, so the deadlines they faced in the classroom with submitting lesson plans, turning in grades, and other assigned tasks were not as challenging as for others, according to the principals interviewed for this study. The principals believed that their second-career teachers had developed the ability to organize and to prioritize in order to be successful in their previous careers.

Beth Smith tied organization to efficiency for both her first and second careers. In her first career, doing her job quickly and correctly was paramount because so many others were depending on her. They could not carry out their work until she had initiated a task. She saw her role as a classroom teacher much the same way. Her students could not learn effectively unless she had planned well, presented the instruction effectively, and provided opportunities for assessment. If she was lacking in any of those areas, students were unable to complete their tasks appropriately. Beth desired to streamline her lessons so that the limited time she had with
students was used in the most efficient manner. She sensed this eliminated any down-time that could have led to behavior issues or loss of focus. Each of the participants mentioned the need for student time-on-task to maximize learning, so anything that would keep the focus on student learning was viewed as a positive. Participants believed the organization skills and ability to multitask allowed second-career teachers to make greater use of the instructional time than a typical first-career teacher.

**Communication skills.** Communication skills developed in a first career played a major role in the transition to the classroom for second-career teachers. Principal participants shared that being an effective communicator positively impacted teachers in a variety of ways. Principal Barnes believed that teachers who were good communicators were able to influence students, parents, and colleagues.

Participants cited the ability to communicate well as the key factor in establishing relationships with students, families, and co-workers. In each of the second-career teacher participants’ first careers, communication was imperative. Vincent shared that as a city planner a large part of his job required gauging the community’s opinions regarding potential projects for the city. This led him to engage in conversations with people from diverse backgrounds, and the conversations helped him gain a different perspective and a greater appreciation for other’s opinions.

Vincent also noted the importance of listening as a part of the communication process. His previous career emphasized the importance of listening to others and seeing things from different viewpoints. He believed that his first-career experience helped him be able to relate better to students and their families in his teaching role. Because he was willing to listen and work with the students and families, he found the home-school relationships to be strong in his
classroom. He described his previous career as one that was very black and white in terms of what was allowed, which helped him navigate some issues in his classroom. When parents were upset about certain policies or curriculum standards, he reverted back to his first-career experience by simply presenting them with the facts. This allowed him to avoid bringing emotions into conversations when it was unnecessary and to focus on aspects that could be controlled and addressed at the school or classroom level.

Communication and relationship building were extremely important in Caroline’s previous in social work. The foundation of her career as a social worker was built upon the ability to foster relationships with families. Transparency on both her part and the family’s part was necessary for her to know the best way to help. Her willingness to listen and nurture relationships with her clients caused families to open up and allowed her to be an integral part of their own family. She shared that because she took the time to show families that she genuinely cared, they were more willing to follow through with her recommendations and allow her to be a part of the solution when dealing with issues.

Even as a second-career teacher, she determined this was important. When she called a student’s home about an issue, she called with a plan in mind and sought to be a part of the solution along with the parents. Phone calls or notes home, which were common forms of communication, were always made with a solution in mind so parents understood it was a group effort. Her past work with diverse families also proved to be beneficial as a second-career teacher as she typically requested to have challenging students and families in her homeroom. She believed that her previous career allowed her to better meet the needs of these students and families because she had a better understanding of the systems the families came from.
Beth and Rhonda came from first-career positions that involved management responsibilities. Their view of communication added a different dynamic to the data. They shared the importance of being able to communicate expectations clearly and concisely to their employees- an idea they thought translated to their classrooms because of their insistence on making sure students understood what was expected in terms of their academic work and behavior.

Communication was a key element of collaborative teams in their first careers. The same concept applied in teaching, because they viewed students, parents, coworkers, and administration as being a part of their team. According to Beth, everything she did was crucial to someone else being able to do their job correctly so she had to be spot on the first time. This attitude of doing the job right the first time because others were depending on her translated well to her teaching role. She referred not just to co-workers depending on her but to the students as well. The students could not learn effectively if expectations were unclear. Any time she had to repeat directions or redo things on her end, she viewed it as a loss of instructional time, which tied back to her desire to maintain an efficient classroom where time-on-task was essential.

Rhonda shared the importance of building relationships with her former employees so they would feel comfortable coming to her when they had questions. She developed a similar mindset with the students in her classroom. The more at ease they were with her and the stronger the relationship, the more likely students were to ask for help and share concerns. Rhonda shared that one important quality of effective teachers was that their students knew they cared and were willing to go the extra mile for them. She also shared that as the relationships with her employees grew, she found herself investing more into them in the form of trainings and
helping them discover their strengths. The desire to develop others carried over to her classroom as she was constantly seeking ways to best use and nurture the talents of her students.

Participants also mentioned the importance of their previously attained communication skills in conflict resolution. This applied to issues with students, parents, and colleagues. Rhonda’s principal, Dr. Rhodes, discussed the significance of wait time as an important factor in Rhonda’s communication skills. A new teacher may speak or act without thinking through all of the repercussions of their actions, but Dr. Rhodes found Rhonda’s previous experience in management and credit collections had given her a unique ability to address frustrated parents and coworkers. She described Rhonda as being solutions oriented with the ability to communicate both the issues and the solutions to parents and students. Dr. Rhodes believed that having customer service experience in which patience was a key factor had paid dividends for Rhonda.

Brittney’s previous experience as an interior designer equipped her with strong communication and presentation skills. While dealing with clients, it was imperative that Brittney listened attentively to fully understand what the client wanted. Once the client’s expectations were clear to her, she would put together design sets to share. In her line of work, presentation skills were crucial because she needed to be able to sell clients on her designs. She compared this to selling students on the content and engaging them in lessons. Brittney expressed the need to present things clearly, yet creatively. Her perspective on communication as a teacher included being able to present effectively to students, coworkers, and parents. She was a curriculum leader in the school and shared that she often had to get others to buy in to some of her ideas. The presentation skills she developed in her design career played a pivotal role in getting teachers on board for some of her initiatives. Principal Barnes and Brittney
agreed that her presentation skills that were developed in her first career allowed her to present content effectively to students and get on their level. She treated each lesson as a performance in which she was trying to sell the students on the content and herself. Principal Barnes cited Brittney’s ability to present material on the student level as her greatest strength.

**Thinking skills.** Participants cited different forms of thinking that were related to their previous careers. Problem-solving skills were mentioned by all of the second-career teacher participants in this study. In their first careers, they were expected to be solutions oriented and fix problems themselves when possible. Teacher education programs can provide a multitude of scenarios for potential teachers to address, but they cannot replicate and anticipate every situation that could happen. As Caroline pointed out, student teachers constantly have a mentor teacher there with them so they are never truly on their own when it comes to certain situations, because the classroom ultimately belongs to the mentor teacher. The student teacher typically addresses issues in a similar fashion to the mentor teacher, which provides consistency for the students but prevents the student teacher from developing their own lens to handle different situations.

Participants shared that during their teaching careers, they had faced numerous challenges that were not addressed in their teacher education program. In their view, the ability to think critically and problem solve could only be developed and refined with real-life experience. While they attributed some of their aptitude in this area to be related to life experience in general, they all stated that their professional experiences had provided an abundance of opportunities to build critical thinking skills.

Beth described teaching as an ongoing process of critical thinking. Everything does not go exactly as planned during the course of a school day. The schedule could have changed for
the day or there may be a technology problem. When these setbacks occur, it is paramount that
teachers are able to think quickly on their feet and develop alternate plans, according to Beth.
She also mentioned that teachers never know exactly what issues students will bring with them
each day. The day often becomes a series of actions and reactions. Having professional
experience in this type of environment could give second-career teachers an advantage entering
their second careers. Beth and Principal Barnes shared a recent example in which one of the
teachers on her three person team was absent, and the school had to reassign the substitute
teacher to a different classroom. Principal Barnes mentioned that Beth had already developed a
plan to combine the classes to accommodate the situation. He noted that most teachers would
have been very anxious and concerned about how to handle the issue, but Beth’s ability to
problem solve and improvise proved beneficial in that particular instance.

Brittney attributed a portion of her success as a second-career teacher to her ability to
think creatively and plan lessons that were outside what is typically seen in classrooms. Her first
career as an interior designer, as well as her undergraduate experience in performing arts, led her
to enter teaching with a different mindset. Brittney likened the instructional process in which she
tried to connect with the students to her experiences performing in front of an audience. Her
creativity appealed to her design clients, and she continued to bring this approach to her students.
However, Brittney shared that because of the increased rigor of the curriculum, she could not
always bring such a high level of creativity to the classroom but worked to incorporate her
creative thinking skills when applicable to the standards. One way she had continued to utilize
her creative thinking skills was in content area meetings with coworkers. She shared that the
thinking process, including brainstorming ideas, she went through as an interior designer
continued to permeate in her teaching career. In her opinion, one of her greatest strengths involved being able to generate ideas within a group.

A previous career also led the second-career teacher participants to approach situations from different perspectives. Being able to think through the eyes of others, especially during times of controversy, allowed these teachers to navigate relationships effectively. They often accepted that there were different ways of doing things and applied this mentality to resolve conflicts with students, parents, and coworkers. Vincent described himself as a different type of thinker than what is normally observed in teachers. Instead of viewing things in a linear fashion as a process, he portrayed his thinking as being more side-to-side and creative. He deemed that being this type of thinker helped him connect with students, especially those who had been misunderstood throughout their school experiences. Vincent expressed his frustration with the way schools typically focused on the traditional way of thinking, alienating students who thought differently. Being able to demonstrate the type of thinking he developed as a city planner and environmental consultant encouraged his students to be receptive to their own creative ways of thinking.

**Content knowledge.** Based on the data in this study, second-career teachers’ content knowledge did not play as large of a role in the elementary setting when compared to previous studies involving secondary schools. With the implementation of the Common Core standards, curriculum became more rigorous. However, with the exception of Vincent, none of the other second-career teacher participants believed their first-career content knowledge played a significant role in being a more effective teacher. The academic coaches and administrators did not consider a deep understanding of the content to be as important as some other factors involved in being an effective elementary school teacher. Instead, they believed the ability to
connect content to real life was more important for elementary school teachers than an overwhelming depth of knowledge. Teachers needed to be able to make the content relevant for students and be able to piece the content together so they could see the value. Beth shared that she had researched the content herself in order to learn more. She had an interesting point of view regarding deep content knowledge at the elementary level:

Being able to give the kids deep information helps me hook them. A lot of times I end up telling them cool stuff that’s not really in the standards, but it gets them interested. Then I can give them the material that they are required to know.

Vincent’s previous career content knowledge was applicable; his undergraduate degree was in geography and cartography, and his previous career included stints as a city planner, cartographer, and environmental consultant. His course load in college involved a significant number of classes in math, science, and social studies, which were the same subjects he was teaching in fourth grade. He believed his previous career equipped him with a deep content knowledge for every major standard he taught. Vincent revealed that his extensive content knowledge also allowed him to differentiate for his advanced learners and prepared him to answer difficult questions students asked in class. In addition, his deep content knowledge allowed him to put parents at ease who were seeking enrichment opportunities for their children. When parents learned about his background, they believed their child was getting a high-quality education in math, science, and social studies. Vincent’s weekly lesson plans revealed an abundance of hands-on activities designed to bring the material to life. He believed that these types of lessons added authenticity for the students where they were able to see real-world connections to the content, which enhanced learning.
Vincent strongly stated that one tremendous benefit of having a previous career in his field was that he knew where to look to find information that was interactive and real for students. His principal, Dr. Vines, echoed those thoughts when she described how instrumental Vincent had been in organizing and enlisting professionals for Valley’s first annual STEM day where students were able to learn about a variety of STEM careers and view demonstrations and experiments related to the field. Through Skype and classroom visits, he had been able to call upon contacts from his first career to present content to the students.

**Research question 2:** What skills do participants see as essential to being an effective teacher?

Each of the three categories of participants (teachers, administrators, and academic coaches) was asked to describe the skills needed to be an effective teacher. There were many similarities between their responses. However, each group placed priority on different skills. The skills that were most important for one particular group were typically not as important from the perspective of the other groups.

**Second-career teachers.** The second-career teacher participants in the study placed care and love for students as the most essential part of being an effective teacher. Effective teachers possessed the ability to see the whole child and understand the background from which they came. They were aware of student differences and were able to differentiate to meet the needs of each student, which called for teachers to be adaptable and flexible as they worked to find ways to appreciate the diverse characteristics of their students. These participants shared that great teachers took a vested interest in the lives of their students and often went out of their way to provide support to students and families outside of the school day.
Motivational skills and the ability to engage students in learning was another skill cited by the second-career teacher participants. They believed that students learned better when they wanted to come to class and participate. Therefore, it was imperative that they were able to make the content relevant and to present instruction in a way that was interesting to students, which also related to the value of effective presentation skills. Brittney’s experience in both interior design and performing arts supported the importance of presentation skills as she compared teaching to giving a performance where captivating the audience was one of the primary goals.

Teachers also listed people skills as an essential component for being an effective teacher. People skills played a vital role in building relationships that were valuable for teachers. Successful teachers must develop strong relationships with students and families as well as with their colleagues. Achieving buy-in from students and parents could play a major role in teaching and learning. This is achieved through relationships that are built on honesty, trust, and mutual respect, which lead to a team approach to education. Collaboration among educators was mentioned as an increasingly important part of teaching. In order to work together and achieve positive results, teachers must be able to collaborate in an environment where everyone’s ideas are valued and each member of the group is free to express their opinions. Because they have become accustomed to working in this type of environment and understand the idea of productive struggle to attain results, participants believed their previous careers had played a tremendous role in this area.

Organizational skills, which included planning and monitoring, were also named as essential to being an effective teacher. Strong organizational skills translated to more time-on-task which played a key role in student learning. The ability to plan high quality lessons and
assess student learning were viewed as part of being organized. Rhonda referred to her first career and the importance of monitoring the performance of her employees, saying, “If you want something done right, then you have to monitor it so you can help them make sure that they’re doing it right.” She described taking the same approach in her classroom as she assessed students and provided quality feedback to make sure they understood the material. This also related to the need to be data wise as a teacher and aware of a student’s strengths and weaknesses. The data allowed teachers to reteach when necessary and provided enrichment opportunities for advanced learners. This practice could be very time-consuming and without effective organizational skills could become an enormous challenge for teachers.

In regard to content knowledge, the second-career elementary school teachers did not place an emphasis on depth of knowledge. In fact, only two of the five teacher participants mentioned content knowledge in response to what skills they saw as being essential for effective teaching. Beth believed that having content knowledge a grade level or so above the grade she taught was sufficient. It was her ability to make the content relevant and enjoyable that played a role in learning. Caroline shared similar thoughts as she referred to her passion for the content as being important, because as her students sensed her excitement about the content, they often followed suit.

A number of other skills were named during interviews but were not as frequent or emphasized as those mentioned previously. For Vincent, the ability to maintain a positive mindset and see the good through the bad was an important skill. He mentioned the need to maintain a proper perspective each day so that his students received his best effort. One way he tried to do this was by exhibiting a sense of humor in his classroom so that he did not get discouraged. Vincent believed that being a reflective practitioner and life-long learner had
allowed him to develop a bag of tricks that he could draw from in the classroom. He described his bag of tricks as something that could only be developed through experience in the classroom.

Administrators. The elementary school principal participants did not elicit a great deal of variety in their responses. Each of their responses could be placed into one of three major categories: content knowledge, relationship building, and teaching mindset. While their responses were also mentioned by the teacher participants, the administrators were much more detailed in their explanations for each response.

Each administrator named content knowledge as essential, but Dr. Vines provided the most clarity on this topic. She shared that having content knowledge was important for effective teaching. However, content knowledge must be purposeful and fit into the curriculum for the teachers’ grade level and subject area. Commitment to the prescribed curriculum played just as large of a role as the content knowledge that a teacher possessed. All of the administrators agreed that effective teachers had a unique ability to make the content real and come to life for students. Dr. Vines believed that having experience in the content area itself as well as teaching the content was important for teachers to be successful with their students.

Teachers needed skills that allowed them to build relationships with their students and families. Knowing how to engage students was pivotal, and they shared that the only way to know how to gain their attention was first to get to know the students and their ways of thinking and learning. In order to do this, administrators believed teachers must first show the students that they care. Working to understand their students allowed them to connect and build relationships that positively impact the classrooms. Principals spoke of teachers in their respective schools who had little to no issues with behavior because they had taken the time to get to know the students and form relationships. When students felt their teachers cared about
them and respected them, they were more engaged and willing to work. Each principal considered effective teachers to be ones who loved their students and were able to connect with them.

The final characteristic mentioned by the administrators took on more of a mindset than a skill set. The principals spoke of effective teachers being passionate about the profession and having that passion illustrated through interactions with others. They were high energy and enthusiastic in their work, and despite some of the negative aspects of teaching, effective teachers maintained a positive attitude and demonstrated excitement for working with students. Principal Barnes stressed the importance of positivity and excitement because he thought it was one area that teachers either possessed or did not. Professional development could be offered to improve content knowledge or to improve communications skills that play a role in developing positive relationships. However, no professional development existed that could transplant enthusiasm and energy for teaching, according to Principal Barnes.

**Academic coaches.** The responses of the academic coaches in relation to the skills that were essential to effective teaching were primarily content based, which varied between teachers and administrators. The only factors mentioned by any of the coaches that were not related to content were a love for students and a belief in students to succeed. Compared to the other groups, the academic coaches were more descriptive in their explanations of the content related skills needed to be effective.

All four academic coaches stated that effective teachers were experts in their content. They agreed that content knowledge could be built through experience and professional development. Effective teachers also employed teaching strategies that allowed them to deliver their wealth of content knowledge to students clearly. The presence of content knowledge only
mattered if teachers were able to relate it to students. The ability to integrate one’s content knowledge and make connections to other subject areas was seen as an important skill for teachers. Because of the diverse classrooms that are prominent in schools today, the best teachers were also able to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of all students. This entailed a large range of problem-solving skills as teachers must constantly work through different methods to make their content knowledge relevant for students.

Effective teachers also had organizational skills that allowed them to adequately prepare and plan instruction for their students. They worked with curriculum coaches and other teachers to develop plans. Their ability to collaborate and share helped strengthen their own teaching as well as the teaching of others. This proved to be a major factor in the development of curriculum pacing guides, which assisted teachers in knowing which content standards to prioritize in their instruction. Effective teachers communicated the content in a purposeful manner that allowed students to gain understanding.

Teachers needed to have a mindset that they wanted to grow and were energetic about taking on new learning opportunities themselves. Continually increasing their content knowledge allowed teachers to be able to make more connections and create more engaging lessons. They were not afraid to ask for help when there were things they did not know. Effective teachers utilized content and instructional experts so that they could increase their own knowledge.

**Research question 3:** How are the first-career skills and experiences of second-career teachers utilized within an elementary school setting?

Several of the first-career skills and experiences impacted more than just the teacher classrooms. Participants shared how second-career teachers had utilized their skills on a larger
scale than their individual classrooms. Many of these characteristics were extensions of how classrooms were affected, while others were entirely unique to the school level.

Participants described the ability of second-career teachers to navigate relationships on the school level. Dr. Church discussed how Caroline’s first career as a social worker allowed her to assist families who were not even in her class. Other teachers came to her to gain a better understanding of the systems in which the students lived. Oftentimes, teachers did not completely understand what a child was going through at home or why parents approached their child’s education in a particular manner. The perspective that was developed in her first career gave her a greater understanding of what students and families experienced.

Caroline described her school as one where all teachers cared about the students and worked to make connections. Dr. Church agreed with Caroline’s assessment of the school’s teachers but added that while the other teachers did care and nurtured the students, Caroline possessed certain qualities that set her apart. Most notably, she shared how Caroline was able to provide interventions and guidance for bridging the home and school relationship, a practice that was common in her first career. For example, Dr. Church shared a story about a student who was suffering severe anxiety over coming to school, and the parent had allowed the child to stay home for numerous days. Caroline was able to counsel with the parent and share specific ways to address the anxiety and develop a plan for home and school that allowed the child to be more comfortable at school. She also worked with the parent on how to address her child’s problems from the parent perspective. Dr. Church believed that Caroline’s social work experience gave her specific directives to share that a typical teacher could have only gained through experience.

In addition, Caroline’s approach to conflict resolution, developed in her first career, was an asset for the school. She had also negotiated issues between coworkers, and Dr. Church
believed that it was the honesty and frankness developed in her first career that served her well in these types of situations at school. All grievances were communicated between parties and solutions were suggested to move forward. She believed this helped maintain a positive culture and work environment within the school.

In general, each participant noted the importance of having positive working relationships in their previous careers. They each expressed a desire to get along with coworkers, work in a positive environment, and establish strong relationships with others. Vincent, Beth, Rhonda, and Caroline each came from careers in which they were a part of a team and collaboration was necessary to perform their duties effectively.

Principal Barnes commented that the second-career teachers he employed over the years understood the value of teamwork to accomplish tasks. He discussed how the traditional view of teaching was always one of isolation compared to other careers. Teachers were responsible for their group of kids and very little sharing took place. He believed teaching was undergoing a shift toward a mindset of greater collaboration, and his second-career teachers were able to thrive in the collaborative setting because of their previous experiences that involved a team approach. He noted the importance of being able to communicate in a respectful manner and be open to one another’s ideas. Their focus was on the children and their learning, so they were open to other’s ideas on how to improve the educational experience for students.

Even though Brittney’s first career in interior design did not entail a great deal of collaboration, Mr. Barnes spoke of her ability to foster a warm climate during meetings and set the tone for all of the students whose classrooms were close to hers. He attributed this to her first career and how she sought to create warm environments not just through the manipulation of
physical space but also with her personality. Every student on her entire hallway benefited from the culture and climate she helped create, according to Principal Barnes.

Principal Barnes shared how Beth’s experience in communication had played a role school-wide. She shared ideas on the best ways to streamline information for students, parents, and the faculty to better refine the communication process throughout the entire school. In Beth’s first career at TVA, she needed constantly to develop ways to improve communication between the IT department and the communications department. Principal Barnes believed this was another characteristic that Beth brought to the school, and her commitment to continuous improvement and being solutions oriented had been contagious amongst her colleagues. They became more apt not to just bring problems to him but also to bring possible solutions, a change that he partially credited to Beth.

Dr. Vines cited Vincent’s first-career experience as instrumental in establishing Valley Elementary School’s first STEM day. Vincent helped coordinate the day’s itinerary, setting up activities and speakers for the program. He was able to utilize the contacts and resources he had obtained during his previous careers as a cartographer, city planner, and environmental consultant. According to Dr. Vines, Vincent had helped math, science, and social studies come alive not just for his students but for his coworkers as well. Vincent shared that he brought a whole school mentality to his teaching position, and he sought out students and teachers he could impact, either through his strong content knowledge or his mindset for teaching.

Administrators shared that their second-career teachers brought a unique perspective to teaching, one that permeates to their coworkers, especially during faculty meetings or grade-level meetings. Their ability to see the larger picture and keep a proper perspective helped foster a positive work environment. Education in Tennessee had undergone a variety of changes and
teachers often became overwhelmed, but administrators credited these second-career teachers as being agents of change and demonstrating adaptability. They were able to focus on the larger issues and block out the aspects that could not be controlled. The curriculum coaches and principals observed many instances where second-career teachers were willing to take initiative and pilot projects at the school level, such as the laptop initiative at Baymont Elementary, a characteristic they appreciated.

During Rhonda’s previous career in office management, she took great pride in developing her employees and helping them find and utilize their strengths. This mindset carried over to the school level. She had been able to develop relationships with teachers and to help them grow. Rhonda’s principal spoke of her approach to professional development and how it had greatly impacted others in the school. She approached every professional development opportunity with the attitude that the training was important, and she could garner knowledge and new ideas. Instead of going into trainings with a negative attitude, other teachers took on some of Rhonda’s feelings regarding the potential impact they could receive.

Brittney shared that the creative aspect of her first career helped her develop a wonderful sense of creativity. As education in the state changed to a more stringent, rigorous curriculum, she did not feel that she was able to apply her creative skills as she had hoped when she first chose to become a teacher. One aspect that she did feel had carried over was her ability to generate ideas and sell those ideas to her colleagues. Principal Barnes and Brittney believed this characteristic was instrumental in getting buy-in from teachers with the one-to-one laptop initiative. Apprehension turned to excitement as Brittney helped lead brainstorming sessions on how the program could be implemented and benefit students. In her first career, she approached each project like a blank canvas and would go through a variety of design ideas until she created
the right one. The ability to think creatively and help others see new ways of doing things proved beneficial, according to her principal. Principal Barnes conveyed that her creativity allowed the ELA content team to explore new ways of doing things which improved instruction. In fact, he seemed to be more aware of how she continued to use her creativity skills than Brittney herself.

Dr. Vines was well aware of another aspect of Vincent’s first career that was serving the school exceptionally well even though it did not relate directly to classroom instruction. Valley Elementary School’s crossing guard job became open when the previous person left their position. A school resource officer was filling in on days that he was at the school at dismissal, but there was still a void on days he was serving at another school. Vincent agreed to take over the position and help coordinate the traffic flow during the end of day dismissal. Dr. Vines commented that parents constantly sang his praises regarding how smoothly traffic moved and how safe their children were during dismissal. Dr. Vines attributed this to Vincent’s first career as a city planner and his ability to think critically and understand the way traffic needed to move to ensure a safe and orderly dismissal.

**Research question 4:** What challenges do second-career teachers face in applying their first-career skills in an elementary school setting?

Several challenges existed that prevented second-career teachers from maximizing their first-career skills in the elementary school setting, many of which reflect the challenges faced by all teachers, especially beginning teachers. Many participants shared that taking control of their own classroom was quite different than they had expected. They were unaware of all of the different responsibilities they would have and all the various hats they would wear as teachers. At times, they had such difficulty keeping up with their duties that they did not feel that they had
the time to plan or implement activities that utilized their first-career skills. The amount of time spent teaching the standards and following a curriculum guide set forth by district personnel did not often afford the opportunity to incorporate the previous experiences.

Rhonda referred to herself as a perfectionist in her first career and found it difficult during her initial years of teaching to come to grips with the idea that she could no longer control everything like she had in her first career. She cited a major difference between conducting trainings with motivated adults who saw these learning opportunities as beneficial and necessary with students who were sometimes unmotivated. A diverse group of kids walk through her door each day, and she mentioned that she often had no idea what her students had been through since they had left school the previous day. She often spent a portion of time each day trying to counsel students and engage them in the content, so there were often issues with having adequate time left actually to teach the content. This made it challenging to incorporate ideas from her first-career since she needed every minute of instructional time to teach the basic standards.

Second-career teacher participants all believed that attending to students’ needs—academic, social, and emotional—left little time to integrate their first-career experiences into their classroom practice. Donna and Destiny, both academic coaches, reported that the teachers they worked with were so overwhelmed with all the different parts of teaching and non-instructional duties that they were fortunate to complete their fundamental job responsibilities. The curriculum had become so stringent and rigorous that very few opportunities for enrichment were available. One area that Vincent mentioned was the desire to make his content even more real for students by doing more hands-on activities and having more experts speak to the class. He shared that this was impossible because he was expected to teach an enormous amount of content in a relatively short period of time.
The emphasis on testing and student achievement had forced schools and teachers to take a different approach to teaching and learning. For each of the second-career teachers in this study, along with all classroom teachers in fourth through eighth grades, over half of their teacher effectiveness was dependent upon standardized test scores. The other part of their evaluation score was composed of observations that were conducted by an administrator. The rubric used for this process did not always coincide with the first-career skills that teachers brought with them. In order to achieve a superior effectiveness score, teachers expressed the importance of fitting in to the rubric as well as having students well versed in the standards for testing purposes. With so much accountability, the participants in this study stated that they must compromise some of their strengths in order to perform well on this scale.

Vincent, however, believed that there should be times when his own accountability in terms of the evaluation process should be ignored. During his recent observation, a student was having a very difficult day because of a home situation. Vincent decided to veer from his lesson plan in order to engage this particular student and make sure he rejoined the class for the rest of the lesson. Even though he may be scored down because of this action, he shared that it did not matter to him: “I don’t know how that will shape up for me but I don’t care because at the end of the day that kid got the skill and he was smiling. And at the end of the day, that’s why I’m here.” In addition, participants viewed their teacher evaluation as only a snapshot of a handful of days that was used to determine their value as teachers. In previous careers, teacher participants viewed their annual evaluation as being determined by their body of work for the entire year.

Participants addressed the issue of instability in the field of education in the state as another challenge they faced. Trying to keep up with curriculum modification, testing changes, and personnel turnover had led them to work extremely hard to keep up. Finding ways to
connect their prior experiences to new curriculum had been challenging. With the change to a new set of standards in Tennessee, which are very similar to the Common Core State Standards, teachers expressed frustration with trying to teach the surface level standards in time for testing, both formative and summative. Teaching the required material sufficiently left little time for extension activities. Beth stated that she had learned to scale down her lessons to focus on the major standards instead of spending time on more interesting details that she believed the students may need at a later time. She enjoyed using this extra information as a hook to get students more engaged in the basic standard, but she admitted that this did take time away from the essential skills she needed to teach.

Participants noted that, even for second-career teachers who did have an extensive amount of content knowledge from a previous career, they were not able to use this knowledge effectively. Oftentimes, their knowledge did not match the grade level standards, or they were unable to convey the knowledge in a manner that students understood. Principal Barnes responded that he saw challenges in differentiating their content knowledge at the elementary level so that it was understandable for all students.

The structure and hierarchy that existed in their schools presented challenges for second-career teachers as well. Rhonda reported, “I feel like I’m having success in some areas that aren’t tested so I have to come to terms with that the difference I might make may not show up anywhere. You know, I may not get a pat on the back for it.” Participants also shared that the approval process for certain things was very drawn out compared to what they dealt with in a previous career. In order to implement certain ideas, some of which related to their first career, they would need to get approval from an administrator before implementing the plan.
Brittney explained a major challenge she faced during her beginning years as a classroom teacher:

There were times when I felt like I probably wasn’t taken as serious…. Those teachers I worked with were very old school of ‘read the text, complete the study guide’ so I don’t know what they thought about me truthfully. I don’t know if they were like she’s crazy. She’s not going to get the job done because she’s not doing it the traditional way.

Many of her activities included hands-on projects and inspired creativity amongst her students, a characteristic attributed to her first career in interior design.

Dr. Church and Caroline spoke of how Caroline’s first-career experiences presented challenges in her classroom. Her social work career had led Caroline to be a teacher who focused greatly on her relationships with students. Both participants stated that, at times, Caroline would get off topic during certain periods in the classroom because she often used stories or antidotes from her own life to make connections with students during instruction. Dr. Church believed this could be very beneficial, but at times it would go on for too long and veered too far away from the content that was being taught.

Principal Barnes had worked with several second-career teachers during his administrative career. Overall, he had been very fortunate with the quality of work these teachers produce, but he pointed out one challenge he had noticed in the past. Occasionally, a second-career teacher would be overconfident because the success they experienced in their previous career. They neglected to ask for help during the transition into teaching and often did not have the pedagogical skills to relate their previous skills and competencies to their students and colleagues, which created challenges for students learning the content.
Another challenge reported was that professional development practices did not always address the needs of teachers, especially second-career teachers. Too often, a one-size-fits-all approach was taken and teachers were mandated to complete certain training, regardless of their needs. Vincent felt that professional development practices geared toward addressing the needs of teachers, namely second-career teachers, could help develop and integrate their first-career skills into classroom practice.

Beth expressed challenges she faced during the teacher education program that prevented her from utilizing her previous experiences. Beth shared that her master’s program was designed for teachers who were already in the classroom and were looking to sharpen their skills. As a result, she believed the coursework was geared more toward certified teachers, and she missed out on how to carry out what should have been simple tasks such as writing basic lesson plans. Her focus during her practicum and first year involved mastering the basic principles of teaching, and she believed this prevented her from fully utilizing her first-career skills and experiences in the classroom. She shared that once she figured out the basics, she was able to draw on her previous skills, most notably her ability to sell students on the content and communicate effectively at the classroom and school level.

Themes

The data collected through the focus group, individual interviews, document analysis, and reflective journals were used for the open coding process in which several themes emerged. Upon the completion of open coding, axial coding was utilized to identify the central theme, or central phenomenon, in this study. The central theme revealed that soft professional skills developed in a first career, primarily in the form of people skills, most greatly affected second-career teacher effectiveness. Competencies that were content specific in relation to a first career
did not play as large of a role as did general professional skills at the elementary level. This was primarily explained by the difficulty second-career teachers had in applying their professionally learned content to the state’s learning standards. Much of what they had in the form of content could not be utilized because they were required to teach the state mandated curriculum. Participants shared that the depth of content knowledge needed to teach in elementary school was not overwhelming. Principal participants stated that the amount of content knowledge needed to teach in the elementary setting could be easily taught to the teachers. In addition, the standards tend to change quite often; so one curriculum shift could render their present content knowledge useless. There were certain skills, however, that transitioned across changes in content and instructional practice.

Table 2 provides a list of the participant responses related to each sub-theme.

Table 2

Number of Participants’ Responses Connected to Each Sub-theme

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<tr>
<th>Coding</th>
<th>Relationships</th>
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<th>Presentation</th>
<th>Content</th>
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Central Theme: Soft professional skills developed in a first career, primarily in the form of people skills, most greatly affected second-career teachers’ effectiveness.

Each of the sub-themes that contributed to the core phenomenon is described below.

Relationships. The ability to form meaningful relationships with students, their families, and colleagues was identified as the single most important factor for being a successful teacher. For Dr. Rhodes, being able to reach out and connect with the community as a whole was an
important factor for success in her highly diverse school. Rhonda’s ability to address issues with students and families earned her high praise and trust from the community. She did not back the students or parents into a corner where they felt threatened. They all felt like they were part of the process in fixing the situation, which led to more engagement from students and parents. Dr. Rhodes and Rhonda shared that forming trusting relationships with families as well as other teachers had been very beneficial for the school community. In her first career as an office manager, Rhonda was able to see the value of positive relationships with regard to her employees and their clients. Dr. Rhodes cited Rhonda’s ability to see issues from multiple perspectives and communicate with different groups as a characteristic that set her apart from other teachers in the school.

Caroline’s first-career experience as a social worker provided ample opportunities to work at developing relationships. Caroline and Dr. Church attributed a great deal of Caroline’s success as teacher to her ability to see the whole child and understand the systems in which they live. She added:

Social work training is all about understanding the systems that people operate in. My master’s is a specialty in family systems and understanding how those affect people and the way they interact. With kids in my class, I like difficult kids. I do. It thrills my soul to have difficult kids. I see their souls, and I know they can be more. I see them growing and changing. I love to be a part of that and try to let them know that there’s more out there for them.

Caroline shared another story regarding a student who was very difficult at the beginning of the year, but later in the year began hugging her and opening up to her. Dr. Church praised Caroline for her respectful approach to discipline in her classroom and the love she brought to every
student as she described the sincere nature in which Caroline interacted with students. The relationships were about much more than student learning. She cared about their home life and their happiness just as much as she did their academics.

Dr. Church also discussed Caroline’s strengths in working with parents. For example, the parent of a student with severe anxiety and some other issues came in for a meeting, and the parent had a difficult time knowing what to do for her child. Dr. Church believed that Caroline’s psychological and social work background allowed her to advise that parent in a helpful manner, which further strengthened the home-school relationship. Dr. Church and Caroline described Chestoa Elementary as a school where teachers focused on the whole child and maintained a nurturing mindset, but Dr. Church insisted that Caroline had distinguished herself from others because of the specific interventions and guidance she could provide.

Another element of her first-career experience that factored in to teaching was Caroline’s ability to be firm in difficult situations. While Caroline was loving and nurturing, Dr. Church mentioned that she was definitely not a pushover when dealing with student and parent issues. She was very frank and honest with students, parents, and coworkers. Therefore, problems were not ignored. This allowed her to work on solutions to problems before they became too large, much like in her first career as a social worker. She checked in with families on a regular basis and was kept abreast of developing issues. This mindset had carried over to her teaching career, and she found herself in constant contact with families, working to nurture relationships on a regular basis rather than waiting for issues to arise in the classroom. Her proactive approach to parent communication stood out to her principal as a quality she did not typically see in other classroom teachers.
Principal Barnes described Brittney and Beth’s ability to connect with students as a major factor in their success as classroom teachers. Beth and Brittney both listed having positive relationships with students as being essential for effective teachers. Referring to both teachers, Principal Barnes stated, “Kids love being in her class, and they connect with her.” He shared that these two teachers did an effective job of getting on the students’ level, which allowed them to learn the types of things that motivated them. Once they discovered what motivated the students, they were able to engage them in lessons and develop lessons that were appealing.

Principal Barnes cited Beth’s first career at TVA as being beneficial on both the classroom and school level. Her ability to see the big picture and communicate expectations to all stakeholders held true in her second career in teaching. For school initiatives, she had shared ideas on how to best communicate actionable items. She valued the importance of everyone being on the same page and working together to achieve goals. Principal Barnes and Beth stressed the importance of communication in building and fostering relationships within the school community. Beth’s experience in communicating efficiently between two departments at TVA had provided insight in how to make sure no stone was left unturned when it came to communicating with students, parents, teachers, and the community. She cited her ability to communicate learning standards in a manner that made sense to students and parents as being a strength as well, which related to her ability to rephrase or summarize ideas in ways that were easily understood by stakeholders.

Vincent’s previous careers required him to work regularly with different members of the community. He needed to learn how to communicate and relate to people from diverse backgrounds and in difficult situations. Vincent referred to instances in his first career when he would have to approach homeowners and ask them to make changes because of neighborhood
complaints or other ordinances. He believed that these types of experiences provided him with the necessary skills to handle difficult parents and set him apart from other novice teachers. Dr. Vines and Vincent shared that his people skills played a major role in his effectiveness as a teacher. He was able to relate to the different students and parents he worked with, which put them at ease and developed relationships based upon trust and respect. Dr. Vines referred to Vincent as a kid magnet due to his ability to connect with all students, even those who were not in his class.

Vincent’s past career involved instances when he would have to respond to citizen complaints, so he learned how to examine issues through a different lens and help members of the community resolve problems. This assisted Vincent in addressing issues between students as well as parent-related issues. Students and parents believed that he listened and worked to help solve problems. This had been achieved because of the relationships Vincent had cultivated with the members of the school community.

All of the participants stressed the importance of being able to collaborate and work together as being important components to effective teaching. Baymont’s focus on content team meetings emphasized the importance of collaboration amongst teachers. Teachers met monthly to discuss curriculum and review lesson plans. Principal Barnes named Beth and Brittney as leaders in these meetings. The initiative they showed, along with their ability to navigate relationships with their peers, allowed them to assume leadership roles and promote change in their respective content areas. Brittney and Beth, like the other second-career teachers in this study, spent the majority of their first careers working with adults. Principal Barnes believed that their first-career experiences working with adults put them at an advantage because they had
learned how to communicate their thoughts appropriately to their peers. In addition, they learned how to compromise and be able to work with a group of people to achieve a collective goal.

Rhonda realized the importance of developing others in her first career in office management. As an office manager, she wanted to help her employees discover their strengths and utilize those skills in the office. As a teacher, she adopted the same mentality. She referred to her willingness to identify and cultivate the strengths of her students and coworkers. Rhonda had fostered collaboration both in her classroom and the school.

**Organization.** Participants named organization skills as essential for being an effective elementary school teacher. Organization skills took on many forms based on the data collected during interviews and document analysis. Participants overwhelmingly cited the increasing number of responsibilities teachers faced in the classroom as a challenge. They believed that teachers played so many different roles that the only way to effectively manage all of the responsibilities was to be highly organized.

The importance of planning and preparation were mentioned by participants as important components of being organized. The amount of paperwork involved in teaching was not overwhelming for Rhonda as she faced similar issues in her first career in office management. She valued the time when she was able to interact with her employees and develop relationships. Rhonda credited her organizational skills for providing her with the opportunity to be out and amongst her employees. In order to have all of her paperwork and other administrative tasks completed, she learned to prioritize and organize so she could work efficiently. By working efficiently with her managerial responsibilities, she was able to work more closely with her staff during their working hours and develop quality relationships. This translated to teaching as she maximized the time she had to spend with her students instructing and developing relationships.
Prioritizing was another component of organizational skills that participants deemed important for effective teaching. The academic coaches spoke frequently about this as they noted the importance of curriculum pacing and determining how much time to spend on each standard. The coaches believed that teachers needed to be in tune with the standards and know which require a more significant allotment of time to teach them thoroughly. For the teacher participants in this study, they discussed the use of formative benchmark assessments to assess student learning. Assessments were given quarterly and addressed preset standards. Daphne spoke of meetings she had conducted where teachers shared the struggles they faced as they tried to teach all of the content from the quarterly pacing guide. These challenges required them to determine which standards needed more attention during the nine weeks and to focus more heavily on those. Daphne conveyed that strong organizational skills allowed teachers to prioritize instruction more effectively.

Organization and consistency were mentioned in the same context by Principal Barnes when describing the characteristics that stood out for Beth. Being highly organized had allowed Beth to achieve a high degree of consistency resulting in her students being well aware of the routines and procedures in the classroom. Rhonda also cited consistency as vital to her effectiveness in a high poverty school because her classroom provided an environment where students knew what to expect, as opposed to the chaos they often experienced at home. She shared that her consistency had allowed students to focus on learning and not dwell on other factors that could impact their school day. Like Rhonda, both Principal Barnes and Beth believed that maintaining consistency in the classroom decreased the number of discipline issues that took away from student learning. Beth’s organization was viewed as a key component in her classroom management plan. There was not any unstructured time where Beth was
searching for materials or trying to get her lesson together. This kept students engaged and increased their time on task. Beth described the importance of her organization skills:

By the time it’s time for me to teach my lesson I have everything I need. I’ve got it laid out with those little magnets with everything we’re going to be doing tomorrow. So it’s all readily available. I think that saves time in the classroom so you don’t have to go looking for things. I try to be efficient. If you have to go look for something that’s when you have a behavior issue pop up probably.

Beth did not just focus on making herself efficient. She also stressed the importance of teaching her students how to be efficient and even rewarded students based on their performance in this area in the classroom. She viewed her commitment to efficiency on her part and the class’ part as a factor in her success as a classroom teacher because it allowed them to stay immersed in the content and maximized the time on task.

The academic coaches viewed organization as important in terms of how teachers grouped students. They cited the use of student data in making instructional decisions as being an area of emphasis even in elementary schools. Destiny and Donna described the importance of organization in assigning reading groups. For example, they stated that teachers needed to be able to analyze sets of data to determine the most appropriate placements for students and to monitor student progress regularly to make data-driven decisions. Being able to keep up with the needs of each student and differentiate to meet their diverse needs required a significant amount of organization, according to Destiny and Donna.

**Presentation skills.** Participants referred to several characteristics related to presentation skills when discussing the qualities of an effective teacher. Administrators named enthusiasm and excitement as being extremely important for effective teachers. These characteristics were
important to administrators because excitement was not seen as something that they could impart to their faculty and staff. Being able to present instruction in a manner that was engaging and interesting for students was recognized as key to effective teaching and learning according to participants. Dr. Rhodes described effective teachers as being those who were passionate and excited about who and what they taught. The enthusiasm that teachers demonstrated rubbed off on students and kept them engaged, according to her.

As an office manager, Rhonda learned the value of summarizing initiatives and policies for her employees. Her presentation skills as a teacher had taken a cue from her management experience. She described the value of being able to communicate her expectations and the content in a way that was clear and concise for the students. The need to maintain an efficient office forced her to be very direct with what employees needed to know.

As a teacher, Rhonda believed that she presented the standards in a way that students could easily understand. She did not describe her presentation of material as being innovative or creative, but her reliance on clarity played a significant role in student learning. Dr. Rhodes echoed these thoughts when she described Rhonda’s ability to eliminate the “fluff” that other teachers frequently integrate into their teaching. She described Rhonda as a teacher who was very intentional with her instruction and focused on presenting the standards as clearly as possible, even during times she was being formally evaluated. Dr. Rhodes shared that teachers often were guilty of trying to do too much when they saw an evaluator come into the classroom, which usually ended up taking away from the actual learning standards. Rhonda’s poise and decision to stick to the standards benefitted her students, according to Dr. Rhodes.

Several participants described effective teaching as being able to sell the students on the content. Beth described her time at TVA:
When I worked at TVA I needed to sell my technology accounts on the benefits of our technology direction and how it could help their business unit. I feel that has carried over to teaching. I have to sell my topic, standard to my students to try to show them how science knowledge benefits them in everyday life and how our country’s past affects them today when teaching social studies.

Brittney, like Beth, saw herself as a salesperson when it came to teaching her students. She spoke of using her creativity to develop presentations that were engaging for students. Brittney described the importance of getting students to buy into both her and the content. As an interior designer, a major part of her job was to sell people on her designs and ideas. The selling part of her first career was one of her major reasons for changing careers, which she attributed to her youth and lack of confidence. What she perceived as a weakness in her first career had actually turned out to be one of her greatest strengths as an elementary school teacher. She also compared teaching to performing in front of an audience, which correlates well with her performing arts background. Brittney added, “I feel like the music part and the performance that I did my whole life, that’s what I feel like I do every day. I feel like I’m on stage.”

**Eagerness to adapt.** Participants noted second-career teachers’ willingness to learn and be flexible as factors that were developed in a previous career. A self-directed approach to professional development was cited by Vincent. He was expected to seek out opportunities to grow in his previous career. As a teacher, Vincent had continued to look for opportunities to develop professionally, but he was often encouraged to attend district mandated trainings in areas that were not directly beneficial to him. Instead of relying on these types of activities for professional development, Vincent explored avenues that addressed his areas of weakness or interest. According to administrators in this study, second-career teachers they worked with
valued learning opportunities. Dr. Rhodes described Rhonda as not just a willing learner but also an eager learner. Even in trainings that others may have seen as mundane or unimportant, she always approached the activity with a positive mindset. She wanted to learn because she knew it ultimately benefited her students. Dr. Rhodes summed up her views on second-career teachers’ commitment to learning:

I have seen other people with their second career who really want to learn everything they can about this because they’re making a major leap in their life choices so they are going to make sure they have done this thing right.

Principal Barnes commented that second-career teachers often had always possessed the mindset of wanting to be a teacher but chose a different career initially. They understood that they needed to work hard and do whatever it took to be successful because they had already changed careers once. It was imperative for them to make teaching work for them.

Vincent’s eagerness to adapt characterized his time at Valley Elementary. During his short time there, he taught two different grade levels and changed content areas. His first-career experience was rooted in the disciplines of science, social studies, and math, which explain his unique approach to teaching these subjects in fourth grade. However, he spent one year teaching first grade and was asked to revamp the reading program for the early grades. His willingness to take on this initiative paid tremendous dividends as his students read more books than any other classroom in the school. According to his principal, Vincent “took first grade to a new level. His data, in terms of words read each week probably mirrored the number of words read in third and fourth grade classrooms; just absolutely phenomenal.”

Dr. Vines also spoke of Vincent’s enthusiastic approach to the new curriculum standards. While other teachers were expressing concern and frustration, Vincent provided a perspective on
how the change would ultimately be better for students and prepare them for their future careers. She listed Vincent’s professional flexibility as one of his greatest strengths and mentioned how his willingness to be open to initiatives trickled down to others in the building.

Second-career teachers’ willingness to adapt played a major role in differentiating in the classroom. Principal Barnes, along with the teacher participants, believed that second-career teachers provided a different perspective to teaching, because they were in careers that offered multiple pathways to achieve their desired results. Therefore, they did not see themselves as being tied down to one particular method of teaching and were constantly searching for ways to improve. Principal Barnes discussed how second-career teachers were able to integrate their student teaching experience with their existing viewpoints of what it means to be a professional to bring an added dimension to a school’s faculty.

Teacher participants shared that students learned differently and were motivated by different things. They believed that effective teachers must be willing to adapt to the needs of their students and not employ a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching. Second-career teachers demonstrated an openness to new ways of teaching that benefitted students. Dr. Church identified Caroline as a teacher who went out of her way to meet the needs of her students, no matter how unconventional or nontraditional the means. Her ability to meet children where they were academically, emotionally, and socially played a tremendous role in her success. Caroline even mentioned her preference for having challenging students despite extra work required to teach them. In her social work career, it was normal to provide services to clients based on their needs. She saw herself as the one who could change more easily in order to meet the needs of others. That mindset carried over to her teaching career.
For many second-career teachers, the daily expectations of teaching forced them to adapt. Vincent noted that things operate in a different manner outside of the academic field. He described the experience of working with teachers who stayed stressed and made some issues bigger than they really should have been. As a teacher, he saw himself more passive in some of his interactions with parents and coworkers. While this was difficult, he understood that schools operated differently in these parameters, so he was willing to compromise in this area at times. Brittney faced similar issues when she entered teaching. She considered herself a creative person and utilized her creative spirit regularly during her early years of teaching. Her coworkers’ views of teaching differed and she found herself having to adjust to fit in with her colleagues. Had she been unwilling to change, friction between Brittney and her coworkers could have negatively impacted the school environment.

Participants also cited the penchant second-career teachers show for engaging in professional growth opportunities. Many had volunteered to be curriculum leaders at the school level and district level particularly to help prepare for the curriculum changes that Tennessee had undergone in recent years. Each of the teacher participants served as leaders on a variety of committees in the school and district, often seeking out these opportunities instead of being appointed to serve. They embraced change and set the example for others on how to approach new initiatives which played a role in establishing and maintaining a positive school climate.

Beth’s work in improving school communication by exploring new methods of correspondence demonstrated her eagerness to adapt to meet the needs of all school stakeholders. Principal Barnes also spoke of Beth’s openness to pilot different strategies at Baymont. For example, she took the lead on a pilot exploring the use of a program called GradeCam. She was not afraid to take risks if she believed students could potentially benefit. He also described how
Brittney had taken the lead on a fifth grade laptop initiative, pursuing any type of training and professional development that the school offered. Brittney’s first career in interior design required her to stay current and adapt to design trends. She approached teaching in the same manner, constantly seeking out the latest developments in education and adopting those practices to her classroom.

**Content connections.** Participants did not cite a teacher’s depth of content knowledge as a major factor in their effectiveness. However, their ability potentially to connect the content and make it more real for students was described as important for elementary school teachers. Of the second-career teacher participants in this study, only Vincent had been able to make specific content connections between his first-career experience and his classroom teaching assignment. Being a fourth grade math, science, and social studies teacher had allowed him to relate his previous careers in cartography, city planning, and environmental consulting to specific content standards. He specifically shared:

I also did design work on detention basins, and all of the good things you need to know in fourth grade as far as water and water cycle and all of that, I’ve helped design some of those.

For Beth, Caroline, Brittney, and Rhonda, their first careers provided rich experiences that transitioned to successful teaching careers, but none of these skills or experiences was connected to the specific content that they taught. The only possible exception was Brittney, who believed that the creativity developed in her first career had allowed her to teach students how to develop an effective hook with their writing:

That hook is your way, that figurative language of simile, metaphor, it doesn’t matter that
you are writing an opinion essay, you can still add that figurative language in there and it’s going to enrich your writing so much more.

Brittney also shared that she got creative by helping students discover creative ways to produce their product, whether it was a writing piece or making a presentation. The speaking and listening standards with the new curriculum related to her experience in performing arts. Even though these standards received far less attention, she shared that her background in interior design and performing arts positively impacted her attention to these standards in her classroom.

Participants, all of whom spent the majority of their time in the elementary setting, discussed the importance of being able to connect the content to real-life as being the most important content-related skill. Vincent’s ability to find resources and utilize the contacts he met during his first career allowed his students to interact with experts in the field and see how the standards were utilized in real-life scenarios, which made it relevant for students. He used Skype and other media to introduce his students to experts who made the content relevant and more engaging. Dr. Vines referred to Vincent’s experience as being an asset for students:

All those experiences make it exciting for students because those real-world connections are key. We know that’s best practice. We know our TEAM rubric talks to us about real-world connections. Why am I learning this? Why is it important? How am I going to use this next year or in ten years? And Vincent is gifted in making those connections.

Dr. Vines also cited Vincent’s ability to provide these connections for the entire school as he utilized his content knowledge and previous contacts from his first career to develop a STEM Day for the entire school. While this may not have reflected the curriculum standards for each grade level, it sparked excitement and interest from students regarding STEM related careers.
Curriculum standards changed frequently in Tennessee during the past decade. Staying in tune with these changes required teachers to commit themselves to learning and researching, according to administrators and academic coaches. As a fifth grade teacher, Beth shared that having the fifth grade content knowledge was sufficient for teaching her students, and if she needed to know more, she researched it herself. She stated, “If you’re a teacher, you should be a life-long learner.” This played an important role with advanced learners who sometimes asked questions that were above the grade level standard. She relied on her own research and her content team to find these answers for students. Beth mentioned the specificity of the standards, and how she saw it as highly unlikely that someone’s content knowledge from a first career would match the standards that have to be taught. Regardless of the teacher’s background, most teachers, if not all, would need to study the material in order to make it beneficial for students.

Cross-case Analysis

Participants (all represented by pseudonyms) for this study consisted of second-career teachers, school administrators, and academic coaches. The data collected from each group shared many similarities with regard to the skills that transfer from a first career. There were, however, some noticeable differences, especially regarding the skills that were essential for being an effective teacher.

Second-career teachers emphasized the importance of building relationships with students as the most important characteristics for effective teachers. They believed that students were more engaged and participated more in class if they had established strong relationships. Brittny shared the following thoughts:

I think a good teacher needs to connect with kids. I think connecting with the kids is key
above probably, honestly planning, assessment, any of that. Connecting with kids so that they would do anything academically to please the teacher.

Vincent expressed the importance of his relationships with students in helping them overcome challenges at home. He stated that his ability to connect with students and help them see opportunity allowed him to motivate students to reach their potential. Caroline’s views were very similar to Vincent’s in that she also developed trusting relationships with students, and they knew that they were valued in her class. Students worked hard for her and invested in her instruction. She desired for every student to feel loved and cared for, so that they were able to focus in the classroom. It was a matter of helping to meet their basic needs so they were free to learn, according to Caroline.

Second-career teacher participants also spoke of the importance of organization. Their jobs required a significant amount of time, and without adequate organizational skills, they did not feel they could be as effective. Beth spoke of organization in terms of efficiency. She referred to having everything in its place and readily accessible for her and the students so little to no instructional time was lost during transitions. This maximized time on task and allowed the class to remain engaged throughout the lesson. There was no downtime for students to misbehave or lose focus. She shared that streamlining tasks during her first career at TVA prepared her for teaching. Beth constantly worked with deadlines and knew that other people could not perform their jobs unless she first completed hers successfully. This required a tremendous amount of organization, and this mindset benefited her in her teaching role.

None of the second-career teachers listed depth of content knowledge as essential for being an effective elementary school teacher. Beth and Vincent felt that a deep understanding of the content could allow teachers to be prepared for higher order thinking questions that may be
asked in class. It could also help them differentiate for advanced learners. Teachers and
administrators believed that content knowledge could be developed through individual research
and study along with professional development. All three groups identified the ability to make
the content meaningful and relevant for students as the most important factor associated with
content knowledge.

All four administrators listed enthusiasm for teaching and energy as the characteristics
they first looked for when hiring teachers. They thought that this quality was something they
could not teach or develop. If teachers are eager to learn and truly love the profession, they
would be open to improving in pedagogy, content, and other professional skills. Effective
teachers related to their students and were able to engage them with interesting lessons. This
statement echoed the sentiments of the second-career teachers. The principal participants spoke
of general professional qualities when describing the strengths of second-career teachers. These
teachers were typically equipped with a strong work ethic and fulfilled their duties appropriately.
They understood the importance of being at work on time and carrying out their duties. For
many first-career teachers, they had not worked in a demanding environment, and the adjustment
to working in a professional setting could be difficult. Principal Barnes stated, “I never worry
about these guys, whether they’re going to be here on time, whether they’re going to be on duty
when they’re supposed to be. They’re going to do all of those things.”

Administrators also recognized the appreciation that second-career teachers had for the
profession. They viewed teaching as an opportunity to impact the lives of others, and teaching
provided a sense of reward compared to their previous careers. The teacher participants truly
believed they were performing meaningful work, and this stood out to their administrators as
well. In addition, they often came from careers that required long hours at work to complete
tasks, and they brought that same mentality to the classroom. Teaching was not seen as an eight hour a day job, and principals referenced the propensity of their second-career teachers to go above and beyond with the time spent working. Administrators were more likely to cite the work ethic of second-career teachers as a strength than the other two participant groups. For the teacher participants, they did not view their long hours as being unusual because they were accustomed to the time demands in their previous careers. It was actually the administrators who took notice of the extended hours their second-career teachers were working compared to most of their other teachers.

The academic coaches differed in their responses regarding what was most essential for effective teachers. Each of the four coaches named content knowledge as the most important factor for being an effective teacher. One literacy coach, Destiny, described the importance of not just having content knowledge but also being enthusiastic about it:

They’re energetic about what they’re teaching so that carries over and the kids get excited. So, I think that’s really important also that good teachers are experts in their content. Maybe not as much in elementary because they teach so many different subjects most of the time but I think a good teacher is, and if they’re not an expert in their content then they want to learn.

The coaches had previous experience working with teachers in middle and high school. They did not feel content knowledge was as important for elementary school teachers as secondary school teachers, but they still listed it as the most important factor for elementary teachers, which differed from the teacher and principal participants.

The coaches were unaware of some of the second-career teachers they worked with. The focus group allowed participants to share experiences working with second-career teachers.
During this discussion, coaches were surprised to hear that some of the teachers they worked with were second-career teachers. They cited the poise and confidence of those teachers as characteristics that led them to believe they had been teaching for their entire career. For the second-career teachers they were aware of, the coaches recognized their eagerness to learn and grow compared to most first-career teachers. Characteristics such as this were more apparent to coaches and administrators than to the teachers themselves. The teachers did not see themselves as exceptional with regard to their general professional skills as the coaches and principals described. Similarly, the teachers did not recognize differences in their commitment to continuous improvement when compared to other teachers. Second-career teachers had a difficult time acknowledging some of the skills that their principals and the district coaches reported them possessing. Table 3 displays the percentage of each participant group who named the listed characteristics when describing the skills needed for effective teaching during data collection. Results for this table are reported in percentages to account for the difference in the number of participants in each group.

Table 3 Cross-case Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill/Characteristic</th>
<th>Teachers (5 participants)</th>
<th>Principals (4 participants)</th>
<th>Academic Coaches (4 participants)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistency</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connect with kids</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trait</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buy-in/Selling</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiasm</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loves kids</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>75%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative</td>
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<td>25%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of humor</td>
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<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
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<td>75%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perspective</td>
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<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionalism</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary**

Chapter Four presented the findings and provided a discussion of the results in relation to previous literature about second-career teachers. A description of each participant was included to provide background information regarding the teacher participants’ previous careers and
teaching experience. Brief descriptions of each principal and academic coach were provided in this chapter as well.

Results were presented for each of the research questions with the primary focus being on the chief research question that examined the first-career skills that affect second-career elementary school teachers. Five major categories emerged from the data: (a) general professional skills; (b) organizational skills; (c) communication skills; (d) thinking skills; and (e) content knowledge. The focus group and individual interviews provided the data for question two, which asked participants to describe the skills essential to effective teaching. Results to RQ 2 presented the findings from each of the three groups of participants. To address RQ 3, interviews and reflective journals were utilized to study the impact of second-career teachers school wide. RQ 4 asked participants to describe the challenges that second-career teachers faced as they transitioned to their new roles as classroom teachers.

Chapter Four also discussed the central theme that emerged from analysis of data from all sources. Second-career elementary teachers had developed strong professional skills that allowed them to build quality relationships and communicate effectively. People skills that factored into their interactions with students, parents, and other teachers laid the foundation for their effectiveness based on the data collected in this study. Sub-themes that factored into the central phenomenon were also identified: (a) relationships, (b) organization, (c) presentation skills, (d) eagerness to adapt, and (e) content connections.

A cross-case analysis that examined the data from the different participants was also included in Chapter Four. Similarities and differences between teacher participants as well as between the different participant groups were included. This section provided details regarding the diversity of first-career skills that were described by the teacher participants.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative collective case study was to understand how first-career skills were utilized by highly effective second-career elementary school teachers in northeast Tennessee. This chapter is comprised of seven sections: (a) an overview, (b) a summary of the findings, (c) a discussion of the findings and the implications with regard to previous literature, (d) an implications section, (e) a limitations section, (f) recommendations for future research, and (g) a summary. The accountability that schools and teachers began to face augmented the need for high quality teachers. In Tennessee, increased rigor in curriculum and testing made it imperative that school districts hire and develop exceptional teachers to meet higher expectations. The hiring of second-career teachers who bring skills and experiences from a first career became a strategy for schools. In many cases, especially at the secondary school level, second-career teachers’ extensive content knowledge was cited as an advantage when compared to first-career teachers. At the elementary school level, teachers typically teach more than one subject making it difficult for second-career teachers to rely as heavily on their content knowledge.

This study utilized data collection from multiple sources. A focus group consisting of district curriculum coaches and individual interviews with second-career teachers and school principals were the primary sources of data collection. In all, 13 participants were interviewed for this study and were comprised of four coaches, four principals, and five second-career teachers. Teacher participants also maintained a reflective journal throughout the course of the data collection procedures. Teachers were asked to reflect each week on any activities or experiences that related back to their first careers. In addition, lesson plans were collected and
analyzed to provide insight into the teachers’ preparation, teaching strategies, and assessments. The theoretical framework for this study was provided by Kolb’s experiential learning theory and Mezirow’s transformative learning theory.

**Summary of Findings**

The need for highly effective teachers in all grade levels and subject areas has grown as schools face increased accountability highlighted by a more rigorous curriculum and modifications to standardized testing. One strategy for meeting the increased expectations has been to hire second-career teachers, who bring a wealth of knowledge and experiences to the classroom. According to Tigchelaar et al. (2010), second-career teachers’ ability to integrate their first-career skills into their teaching practice positively impacts student learning. However, Tan (2012) discovered that not all skills acquired from a first career can be effectively applied to teaching practice. This study sought to understand the first-career skills and experiences that were utilized by effective second-career elementary school teachers as determined by the TEAM evaluation model for teacher effectiveness. Previous studies have focused primarily on second-career teachers at the high school level because they are able to focus on content related to their first careers, especially in STEM related classes. Elementary school teachers typically teach more than one subject, so deep content knowledge may not play as large of a role in their effectiveness as a secondary school teacher.

This study aimed to identify the skills and characteristics that second-career teachers developed in their first careers that transitioned to the elementary classroom successfully. As a result, school administrators can take these factors into account when hiring new teachers as well as when structuring professional development opportunities that utilize the competencies of second-career teachers. This study concluded that second-career teachers are more likely to be
effective than first-career teachers as they enter the teaching profession. One primary research question and three sub-questions were developed to guide the study.

Interviews with second-career teachers and reflective journals provided insight from the teachers’ point of view. They were able to describe in detail their first career and how their skills have transitioned to the classroom. Interviews with academic coaches and school principals allowed them to share their prior experiences with second-career teachers and focus on the second-career teacher participants in this study. Interviews also allowed principals and academic coaches to describe the qualities of second-career teachers compared to other teachers in their schools. In many cases, the coaches and administrators were able to pinpoint specific skills that the teachers took for granted that had become tacit knowledge. Teacher participants did not realize they were exceptional in some areas, but their administrators and the academic coaches could see how they stood compared to other teachers. Lesson plans were analyzed to develop an understanding of their teaching strategies and planning practices.

The primary research question for this study was as follows: How do the skills acquired in a first career affect second-career elementary school teachers? Participants’ responses could be categorized in five different ways. The first category identified was general professional skills, which included responses related to work ethic, reliability in terms of assuming their responsibilities in the appropriate manner, professional flexibility, and poise in challenging situations. Skills in organization and communication that were developed in a first career provided authentic learning experience that allowed second-career teachers to enter teaching with more refined skills in these areas. Participants also noted the thinking skills, most notably critical thinking and problem solving, as skills that transitioned effectively from their first career to the classroom. A final category for the participant responses was content related, which was
primarily applicable to one participant who was teaching subjects related to his first career. However, other participants described the importance of being able and willing to learn the content to be able to make connections for students.

The first sub-question asked participants to discuss the qualities of effective teachers: What skills do participants see as essential to being an effective teacher? Each group of participants shared different viewpoints. Teacher participants cited a love for students as the most important characteristic, followed by the ability to motivate students, people skills, and organization skills. Administrator responses differed from the teachers as they focused on content knowledge, relationship building, and enthusiasm for teaching. In terms of content knowledge, administrators emphasized the need to make the content real and relevant for students, rather than having in-depth content knowledge. Principal Barnes (pseudonym as are all participant names in this chapter) believed that the content knowledge itself was important but that the school could provide professional development in that area. Academic coaches focused on skills related to content and presentation of instruction. They also named a love for students and a belief in student ability to succeed as characteristics of effective teachers.

The second sub-question explored the impact of second-career teachers on the school as a whole, rather than just their classroom: How are the first-career skills and experiences of participants utilized within an elementary school setting? This question was very similar to the primary question, but it explored the effect of second-career teachers on the school, rather than a single classroom.

Second-career teachers can bring unique experiences from a first career to their school, but many schools fail to utilize these professionals (Trent & Gao, 2009). Interviews with administrators and teachers revealed that these teacher participants’ impact went far beyond their
own classrooms. Three of the participants mentioned the ability to cultivate relationships school-wide with families and colleagues as a way that they impacted the school on a larger scale. They helped shape the climate of the school as a whole because of their ability to forge relationships in and out of the building. Teacher participants were also cited as being leaders within the school, especially because of their willingness to learn new things and set the stage for school-wide initiatives. One participant’s first career allowed him to develop an impressive network of professionals in the areas of science and math, which was a tremendous asset in developing the school’s first STEM Day. This provided students from all grade levels with the opportunity to participate in a variety of STEM related activities.

The third sub-question examined obstacles that may inhibit second-career teachers from fully utilizing their first-career skills: What challenges do participants face in applying their first-career skills in an elementary school setting? Teacher participants provided first-hand accounts of the challenges they faced as they transitioned into teaching. Administrators and academic coaches were also able to describe some of the hurdles that second-career teachers face with fully implementing their first-career competencies. Primarily, the challenges involved time constraints and the vast number of responsibilities held by classroom teachers at the elementary school level. They were often so overwhelmed to keep up with basic teacher expectations and their students’ needs that they were unable to fully integrate ideas from their first career. Participants also cited the continual changes in education in Tennessee as a challenge, most recently in the areas of curriculum, testing, and teacher evaluation. In addition, many of the first-career skills did not fit the mold of what is expected of teachers, so they were unsure of how well they could integrate their first careers into teaching.
Based on all the data collected from the different sources, a central theme emerged: Soft professional skills developed in a first career, primarily in the form of people skills, most greatly affected second-career elementary teachers’ effectiveness. Several sub-themes were also determined as factors in the effectiveness of second-career elementary school teachers: (a) ability to develop and navigate relationships; (b) organization skills; (c) presentation skills; (d) eagerness to adapt; and (e) content connections.

Discussion

Identifying first-career skills that transition into effective teaching practice at the elementary school level can make a profound impact on the hiring practices of schools and the professional development programs that are implemented. Administrators and other school personnel involved in the hiring of teachers can take into account the skills that teacher candidates have developed in a first career and how those particular skills can benefit the school. The majority of skills that participants reported as essential to effective teaching were actually cited as skills that second-career teachers brought with them from a first career. Most notably, professional skills involving the ability to form relationships, communication, and organization skills were relayed during interviews. If schools are able to hire new teachers who are already equipped with these types of skills, they can focus more on pedagogy and content related issues rather than the general professional skills that may be lacking. Even seasoned teachers could become overwhelmed with the daily responsibilities of teaching. Beginning teachers typically face similar demands while also learning to navigate a professional career for the first time. Participants believed that second-career teachers were better prepared to handle the early demands of teaching because of their prior work experience.
The majority of the skills described by participants were skills that are best learned through experience. The two theories that provided the theoretical framework for the study recognize the value of experience in the learning process. David Kolb’s experiential learning theory and Jack Mezirow’s transformative learning theory play a prominent role in the transition from a first career to a second career in elementary education because of their focus on adult learners and the manner in which their previous experiences impact their learning (Kolb, 1984; Mezirow, 1997).

Kolb’s experiential learning theory is rooted in the belief that learning is shaped by one’s experience. Learning is viewed as a dynamic process that is constantly reshaped through one’s experiences (Kolb, 1984). The environment and context in which experiences take place impact the acquisition of new knowledge. First-career experiences equip second-career teachers with skills and knowledge that can positively impact their effectiveness as elementary school teachers. Principal Barnes argued that some of the most important skills that teachers needed were only developed through experience and could not be explicitly taught through school-wide trainings or professional development. Hiring second-career teachers could eliminate some of the growing pains that first-career teachers experience when they enter the classroom. Challenges would still exist in other areas of the job, but their previous experience could provide for a smoother transition.

Second-career teachers complete their coursework in one setting before taking part in an internship, or practicum, an experience that allows them to apply their knowledge in a school setting (Chan, 2012). This is a common practice for prospective teachers regardless of whether teaching is their first or second career. The student teaching experience places the prospective teacher with a mentor teacher, who is normally a seasoned teacher. They receive guidance on a
daily basis but normally adhere to the mentor’s way of operating the classroom. In addition, major conflicts and issues that arise in the classroom are typically handled by the mentor teacher, which limits the student teachers’ authentic experience in addressing many difficult situations, according to Beth. Second-career teachers, however, also have their first-career experience to inform both their coursework and practicum experience. They have gained real-life experience in navigating challenging professional relationships during their first careers, which augments the experience they gain in the classroom during student teaching. They have essentially gained some levels of authentic experience in at least two professions and bring diverse backgrounds to the classroom.

Second-career teachers in this study shared how their first-career experiences had influenced them in their teaching roles. Skills that were developed during their first-career experiences factored in to their effectiveness as a teacher. Teacher and principal participants spoke of how the general professional skills that transfer to teaching can only be fostered through authentic experience. For example, establishing positive relationships with people from diverse backgrounds cannot be taught. It must be learned and practiced through real-life experiences. Learning how to conduct oneself as a professional also requires authentic experience. Having experience in a first career can greatly benefit teachers and schools because they are typically well-equipped to handle the professional duties of the job and can focus on the instructional aspects of teaching. Beginning first-career teachers could potentially be faced with the need to refine the instructional components and also develop the professional skills to carry out the job effectively.

Experience also plays a role in Mezirow’s transformative learning theory. According to Mezirow’s theory, learning is a process that is shaped by the learner’s perspective through
experience (Mezirow, 1997). Transformative learning theory is primarily associated with adult learning and takes into account the prior knowledge that learners possess as they engage in new experiences. Prior knowledge must be altered to account for new experiences that reshape the learner’s perspective (Bass, 2014). Second-career teachers often pursue their teaching credentials after they have started families of their own, which enables them to view teaching from the perspective of a parent as well.

Second-career teachers enter teaching with assumptions about their new careers (Chong et al., 2011). These assumptions may have been constructed from their first career or from their own experiences as a student. In some cases, second-career teachers have children of their own, so their experience as a parent has factored into their beliefs on education. Existing knowledge coupled with new learning helps shape second-career teachers’ identity in the school setting. Previous career experiences can allow second-career teachers to view situations from multiple perspectives, which can prove beneficial to students and families. In this study, several participants described second-career teachers’ appreciation for the profession of teaching. In many cases, they experienced a working environment that was not personally rewarding or meaningful. They bring a mindset to teaching that they are able to make a positive difference in the lives of others. Viewing teaching from this perspective provides the foundation for establishing relationships and nurturing students, which were identified as two characteristics of effective teachers in this study by the participants.

Both of the theories that provided the framework of this study include a reflective component. Building knowledge through experience and in different contexts supports the need to develop self-directed learners who consistently reshape their knowledge based on experience. Learning should be a continuous process in which prior knowledge is combined with new
experiences. Each of the teacher participants in this study were identified as being independent learners who displayed enthusiasm with regard to their own learning when compared to a typical teacher.

The central theme that this study yielded was that general professional skills developed in a first career played the most significant role in the effectiveness of second-career elementary school teachers. These skills included, but were not limited to, the ability to foster positive relationships with others, communication skills, organization skills, presentation skills, and flexibility. These results were comparable to previous studies by Etherington (2009) and Richardson and Watt (2006) that named professionalism and interpersonal skills as characteristics that supported career changers as they entered teaching. In a 2010 study by Watson et al., teachers named teacher affect as the most important quality of effective teachers. Teacher participants in the present study responded in a similar fashion as they cited love of students as the top quality found in effective teachers. Interestingly enough, teachers in both studies referenced characteristics that were more student centered in nature as essential to effective teaching and learning.

The results of Block’s (2012) study revealed a student-centered approach with extensive content knowledge as a characteristic of effective teachers. With the exception of the academic coaches, the participants in the study did not value second-career teachers’ content knowledge as much as their personal skills and teaching mindset. At the elementary level, participants in this study determined that the teachers’ ability to make the content relevant for students is key. The depth of content knowledge that plays a significant role in a secondary school setting is less important at the elementary level. One principal participant spoke of the ease in building teachers’ content knowledge through professional development and individual research. Only
one principal cited their second-career teacher’s content knowledge as being beneficial in the classroom, and it centered more on his ability to find resources and make the content come to life. At the elementary level in Tennessee, content knowledge has become more extensive as a result of curriculum changes, but relatively speaking, the content does not require the depth of understanding that is needed in middle and high schools.

Studies conducted by Young (2009) and Bright (2012) that addressed teacher quality named several characteristics that are factors in effective teaching. Skills in collaboration, self-learning, and relationship navigation were detailed in both studies. These characteristics were also reflected in the responses of the teacher and principal participants in the present study when they were asked to share what set their second-career teachers apart from other faculty members, namely novice teachers. Recognizing that second-career teachers have already developed so many of the skills that previous studies have deemed as characteristics of effective teachers should impact the way teachers are hired.

Brittney Towns believed her ability to present instruction effectively and connect with students played a role in her effectiveness. This supported previous studies by Grant et al. (2011) and Bright (2012). Grant et al. referred to a teacher’s verbal ability as being key to student learning, namely that their ability to present instruction in an engaging way was essential to students’ learning. Bright cited non-verbal strategies such as proximity to students, eye contact, and continuous movement as important components of presentation as well. Teachers who possess a strong presence that is demonstrated through their presentation skills can engage students successfully.

Even though this study focused on second-career elementary school teachers, the results yielded similar results to previous studies involving secondary school teachers with the exception
of the depth of content knowledge. Career changers have often developed deep content knowledge that allows them to respond to challenging questions that may be asked by their students. At the high school level, expertise in a specific discipline allows teachers to serve students more effectively (Fry & Anderson, 2011) and provide real-world applications (Tigchelaar et al., 2010). Shortages in the area of math and science led school districts to recruit STEM professionals to fill these teaching roles (Grier & Johnston, 2012). The complexity of the curriculum requires an expert in the content area. At this level, administrators can hire teachers with rich content knowledge then work to develop the teaching strategies and non-instructional skills that are needed to be an effective teacher.

This thinking contrasts with the views of the elementary administrators in the study who preferred to have teachers who were equipped with a variety of professional skills. They believed it would be easier to build the content knowledge for their teachers than to develop the soft skills. The school district utilized for this study had the benefit of employing several academic coaches who were able to work with teachers to address specific curriculum and teaching strategies that could improve learning. Little to no support was offered to address teacher needs in regards to professionalism, which required teachers to have to develop these skills over time and through experience. In some instances, second-career teachers experience a smooth transition to the classroom as they see their new career as a continuation of their first career, especially if some teaching and training responsibilities were involved. This is evident in vocational education as instructors have typically worked in the area that they teach (Murtagh et al., 2011).

Fry and Anderson (2011) noted several other skills, such as communication, organization, and problem-solving, that career changers possess as they transition into teaching at the
secondary level. The majority of these skills were reflected in this study by the responses that participants cited regarding second-career elementary school teachers. For example, both studies listed communication and organization skills as important characteristics that were developed in a first career. Communication skills included the ability to relate to students, parents, and colleagues, which capitalizes on the thought of relationships being paramount at both elementary and secondary levels of schooling. Organization skills established in a first career can provide a foundation for the planning and classroom management aspect of teaching (Tigchelaar et al., 2010). Participants in this study cited the importance of their organization skills in being able to perform all of the duties required in their teaching career. Dr. Rhodes, for example, shared that Rhonda’s levels of organization and poise prevented her from being overwhelmed by all of the demands of teaching when compared to the way other teachers handled the demands.

Many career changers developed professional flexibility during their first career. The dynamic nature of many professions requires workers to adapt and learn new ways of doing things (Fry & Anderson, 2011). This mindset is equally important in education where changes frequently occur. A challenge participants experienced when applying their first-career skills was the constantly changing landscape of education in Tennessee, where alterations to curriculum, testing, and teacher evaluation have been implemented in recent years. This would present a challenge for all teachers in terms of adopting the new changes and learning new ways of teaching, but second-career teachers have already undergone a significant change in their career switch and could be better suited for the evolving nature of teaching compared to other novice teachers. Fry and Anderson (2011) suggested that second-career teachers are often better prepared to adapt to changes in the profession. Given the changing nature of education, teachers need to be able to adjust effectively. Teachers who do not possess the ability to adapt to changes
face an uphill battle. Second-career teachers are often able to acclimate to changes more readily because of the flexibility developed in a previous career.

Previous studies described challenges that second-career teachers faced in their pathway to teaching that were not shared by the teacher participants in this study. Only Beth believed that her teacher education experience was inadequate, a belief she attributed to the composition of her cohort, which included a majority of practicing educators. This was similar to the participants in Etherington’s (2009) study who did not consider their teacher education experience to fully meet their needs during their practicum. They preferred an experience that took their previous skills into account and was tailored to their individual needs.

Unlike Williams (2010) study, the participants in this study did not believe they were challenged by unrealistic expectations from their supervisors and coworkers. In Williams’ study, second-career teachers reported that they faced higher expectations than first-career teachers because of their previous career experience. None of the teacher participants in this study stated that they faced higher standards. They believed they were treated the same way as a first-career teacher when they began. Brittney shared that her creative way of doing things in her classroom when she first began teaching led to some uneasiness on her part, because she did not know how the other teachers felt about her way of doing things. She described this as a minor challenge that did not change her approach. It was not until the changes in accountability that she changed to a less creative style.

The second-career teachers in this study believed the diverse composition of their cohorts was actually beneficial, unlike the second-career teacher participants in a previous study who described feelings of isolation during their teacher education experience (Williams, 2010). The participants in Williams’ study did not experience a strong connection with their classmates,
which could limit their professional networking once hired as a teacher. Caroline believed the diversity in her cohort was a tremendous asset, because she was able to learn from a variety of people who came from different backgrounds. She shared that some of her classmates were already teachers who were coming back to learn more, some had entered the master’s program immediately after receiving their undergraduate degree, and others, like her, were entering teaching from a first career. In her opinion, their differences were a major reason why she enjoyed the program.

Administrators and academic coaches cited the initiative of second-career teachers regarding trainings and professional development. They mentioned the eagerness with which they actively participate in learning activities. However, only Vincent spoke specifically about professional development. He believed that he, along with all other teachers, was required to attend certain activities that did not make the best use of his time and needs. As Looney’s (2011) study reported, professional development activities do not always address the needs of its participants. The emphasis on mandated trainings over self-directed learning presented an issue for Vincent.

**Implications**

This study yielded results that can positively impact teaching and learning at the elementary level. The results of the study can be applied to the hiring practices of school districts to employ educators who enter teaching with many of the skills considered essential for being a highly effective teacher. Additionally, refining professional development practices can enlist the expertise of teachers to create a culture of learning amongst faculty members. The presence of second-career teachers at the elementary school level can enhance the school
Participants shared their views on the skills that are essential for effective teaching and learning in the elementary school setting. Their responses were similar to the findings from previous studies regarding teacher quality. Overwhelmingly, the skills referenced as essential for high quality teaching mirrored many of the skills that second-career teachers transfer from a first career. Knowing that career changers into education possess a wealth of these skills that are deemed as essential for effective teaching can help school personnel make well-informed decisions regarding hiring teachers, as this study revealed that second-career teachers are more effective than first-career teachers as they begin a career in elementary education.

Experience in building working relationships, communication, organization, and other professional skills allow second-career teachers to turn their attention to areas that may be easier to learn independently. Participants agreed that, at the elementary level, teachers can become experts in the content through self-learning, research, and professional development. Many of the professional skills are only able to be developed through authentic experience, making it extremely challenging to adequately prepare and train teachers in these areas prior to entering their own classrooms.

Student teaching provides real-world application of the coursework completed during the teacher education program. However, the experience typically lasts less than a year under the guidance of a teacher which limits their autonomy in decision making in the areas of curriculum, classroom management, and parent communication. Student teachers are normally expected to follow suit with their mentor’s approach so students maintain consistency in the classroom.
Second-career teachers bring a well-rounded, authentic professional experience that eliminates many of the gaps that beginning teachers have as they enter teaching.

**Implication Two**

The type of first career is not as important as the presence of a first career. The second-career teacher participants in this study brought diverse experiences from their first careers. While each career lent some specific skills and competencies, the most essential skills for effective teaching, according to participants and previous studies, were common amongst the five participants. Each of the five had developed common professional skills in the areas of communication, collaboration, relationship building, and flexibility that were identified by their principals as being skills that were more developed and apparent than in beginning first-career teachers.

The specific content knowledge from each of the participants varied, and only Vincent was able to directly apply subject-specific content into his teaching practice. His previous experience in a science and social studies related career was utilized in his teaching role. The other participants, however, referred more to the non-content related skills that impacted their teaching practice. For example, Brittney’s background in the performing arts transitioned to the presentation aspect of teaching. Her ability to engage an audience of students drew students into the lesson, which she and her principal cited as one of her greatest strengths.

Because most elementary school teachers teach more than one subject, specific content knowledge from a first career may not play any type of role. Rhonda’s career in office management, along with her work in credit and collections, did not appear to be related to her role as an ELA teacher. She referred to her organization skills and people management skills as
factors in her effectiveness. Caroline’s situation was similar as her social work background produced exceptional relational skills but offered very little in terms of the content she teaches.

The content standards in Tennessee have undergone numerous changes over the past ten years. Because of the large number of standards, teachers can rarely veer from the specific content standards. Even for someone like Vincent, whose teaching role was complemented by his first-career content knowledge, not all standards coincided with his expertise. In some cases, a second-career teacher may have an extensive amount of content knowledge that does not match the learning standards for a particular grade. This emphasizes the importance of skills that are necessary regardless of what the specific curriculum standards are. General professional skills, mainly in the areas of people skills and relationship building, transcend any changes to curriculum.

**Implication Three**

The third implication from this study was that schools need to utilize the experiences of second-career teachers on the school level. Each of the second-career teacher participants in this study impacted more than their classroom of students. In some cases, their influence reached beyond the classroom to the families of students and their coworkers. For example, Caroline’s social work background allowed her to connect with families from all over the school and provide guidance to classroom teachers to do the same. She had shared behavior interventions to support students and families at home and school. Her peers often enlisted her advice when dealing with struggling students, and she was able to draw from her first career to positively affect those students.

Principal Barnes referred to Beth’s ideas for streamlining communication as being beneficial to the entire school community. In a school the size of Baymont Elementary,
communication was paramount, and Beth’s recommendations for refining communication procedures to provide more clarity and efficiency were appreciated by the school community. Rhonda’s first career as an office manager allowed her to build a desire for recognizing other’s strengths and developing them as leaders. This transitioned to her position at Ridgecrest Elementary as she encouraged others to capitalize on their strengths and provide leadership in different areas within the school. Beginning teachers are often trying to discover their own professional strengths so taking the time to develop a critical eye and assist other adults in building on their strengths could prove cumbersome.

Vincent’s first-career experience was instrumental in introducing a STEM Day at Valley Elementary. In addition to his content knowledge and ability to show real-world connections to the content, his extensive network of contacts was a driving force in planning the event. Vincent’s knowledge of where to find resources and who to approach for certain information allowed the school to schedule experts from a variety of math and science related careers. All of the students at Valley were exposed to professionals that provided a unique learning experience and possibly inspiration to one day pursue a STEM related career.

Limitations

Participants were comprised of educators from a single school district in one particular region in Tennessee. Their experiences as second-career elementary teachers had been shaped in large part by their time in this particular district, with the exception of one participant who spent a portion of her teaching career in a neighboring district. Participants in other districts could yield different results from this study. In addition, participants in this study responded to interview questions and presented lesson plans based on the learning standards specific to Tennessee. The new state standards in Tennessee were similar to the Common Core State
Standards that were adopted by many other states, but there were some differences. Second-career teachers could possibly apply their content specific knowledge more effectively with a different set of learning standards. Tennessee’s standards could have offered fewer opportunities to directly apply their previous knowledge. The study also limited participants to second-career elementary teachers who had less than ten years of experience, had a teacher effectiveness score of a 4 or 5, and taught a tested grade where they owned their own data. None of the teacher participants taught a non-tested grade, which excluded kindergarten through second grade teachers from the study.

Data were collected through interviews, a focus group, analysis of lesson plans, and a reflective journal kept by each teacher. Teacher participants were very open during the interview process, which could have been attributed to the familiarity with the researcher who works in the same district. Journal entries varied by teacher. Some provided very detailed summaries of how their first career influenced them throughout each week, highlighting a variety of instances. Others reported very little in terms of specific examples of occasions when they referred to their first career over the course of the week. Interviews with administrators and coaches also revealed characteristics the teachers did not realize they were exhibiting. For the teachers, these skills had become part of their tacit knowledge and were so entrenched in their routines that they failed to cite all of the skills they developed in a first career (Smith, 2001). The transition of first-career skills to tacit knowledge could have limited the data that were shared by teacher participants.

Another potential limitation was the lack of familiarity between the second-career teacher participants and the other participants. Three of the teacher participants had taught in their school for less than four years, and only one of the principal participants had served in her
current role for more than three years. The academic coaches typically worked in each school for one day each week. Other than this limited time, their only other interactions with the teacher participants were in district-wide trainings with a larger group of teachers. Academic coaches had the opportunity to observe in the classrooms of teachers but in a coaching capacity. Coaches were more familiar with instructional components of teaching rather than the non-instructional areas that were cited by teacher participants as transitioning from their first career. Academic coaches were limited in the specificity of teacher participants’ first-career skills but were able to share experiences working with other second-career teachers who were not selected for participation in this study. Administrators and coaches were aware of the teacher participants’ first careers but had limited knowledge regarding the specific responsibilities from that first career. Had they had a greater understanding, they could have potentially provided more in-depth descriptions regarding the teacher participants.

Perhaps the greatest limitation of this study is the exploration of a relatively small number of first careers. The five second-career teacher participants came from five different career backgrounds: (a) office management; (b) communications; (c) cartography and city planning; (d) interior design and performing arts; and (e) social work. Data collected from this study were primarily based upon the experiences of second-career teachers from the listed careers. Administrators and curriculum coaches did provide responses that accounted for their previous experiences working with other second-career teachers, but the details from those experiences were not as detailed.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The study sought to understand the first-career skills that effectively transition to the elementary school classroom. Interviews with second-career teachers, school principals, and
district academic coaches provided the majority of the data. The analysis of teacher lesson plans and a reflective journal maintained by the teacher participants also provided data for the study. Prior research focused on second-career teachers at the middle and high school levels. Some research focused on the skills that transition to teaching at these levels, while other studies examined the motivations for teaching as a second career and challenges faced by second-career teachers. This study adds to the existing literature by exploring the transition from a first career to teaching at the elementary school level. In order to provide greater insight into this topic, more research is needed.

This study has the potential to be a springboard for further research regarding second-career elementary school teachers. Studying multiple participants from the same first career would allow the researcher to compile more extensive information and make comparisons across grade levels and content areas. For example, the researcher could focus on career changers from a business background and determine how their previous careers impact instruction at a variety of grade levels or academic disciplines. This could potentially assist school personnel in pinpointing potential teaching candidates for specific grade levels and content areas.

Exploring career changers from a different set of first careers than those used for this study could provide further insight into the transition to teaching as a second-career. Researchers could determine which careers are producing the most delayed entrants to teaching and focus their study on second-career teachers from that area. Replicating the study in other states that have drastically different standards from Tennessee could provide an added perspective. Second-career elementary school teachers in other states may have an easier time utilizing their content knowledge because it aligns with their state standards.
This collective case study was bound by the inclusion of second-career teachers with a teacher effectiveness score of a 4 or 5 based on Tennessee’s TEAM evaluation process which combines classroom observations with student achievement scores. Other states that have different methods for assessing teacher effectiveness may yield a larger population of teachers from which to select participants. This could potentially make it less difficult to include teachers who do not teach in grade levels that are tested.

A final recommendation for further research would be to conduct a longitudinal study that tracks second-career elementary teachers from the practicum experience through their first three to five years of teaching. This could allow researchers to study how their first-career skills are utilized over time and to see if there is a preponderance for those skills to increase or decrease as teachers gain classroom experience. It would be interesting to learn if second-career teachers reach a certain point where their first-career skills are not a factor in their teaching practice, and they are essentially no different from someone who entered teaching as a first career. As first-career teachers gain authentic experience navigating relationships and deal with challenging situations on their own, do they eventually catch up with the second-career teachers who had already developed those types of skills before entering teaching? Along those same lines, at what point does a first-career teacher truly develop the professional skills that second-career teachers typically have when they begin teaching? A study that tracks the experiences of first-career teachers along with second-career teachers could allow schools to determine if the benefits to hiring second-career teachers remain apparent once first-career teachers have gained professional experience.
Summary

The purpose of this qualitative collective case study was to understand how first-career skills were utilized by highly effective second-career elementary school teachers in northeast Tennessee. Second-career teachers, school principals, and district academic coaches provided the data for this study. A focus group, individual interviews, lesson plan analysis, and reflective journals allowed the researcher to achieve triangulation by collecting data from multiple sources.

Data analysis through open and axial coding revealed a core phenomenon, or central theme. In terms of second-career elementary teachers, the soft skills that were developed and refined in a first career played the most significant role in their effectiveness. People skills and the ability to establish positive relationships emerged as prominent skills in effective teachers. Organization skills, presentation skills, and professional flexibility represented other factors that impacted the effectiveness of second-career teachers.

These findings were similar to previous studies of second-career teachers at the secondary school level. The most apparent difference involved the importance of the content knowledge that was acquired during a first career. For elementary teachers, content knowledge was viewed as important, but participants spoke of the ability to build their grade-level content knowledge through professional development and individual research. The ability to make the content relevant and meaningful for students was more important than having a deep knowledge of a specific subject area. The findings from this study have the potential to improve hiring and professional development practices at the elementary level. Employing second-career teachers who are already well-versed in general professional skills allows administrators to concentrate their efforts on instructional components and teaching strategies as they invest in new teachers.
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November 11, 2015

Timothy Joshua Simmons
IRB Approval 2330.111115: Transitioning First-Career Skills into a Second Career in Teaching: A Collective Case Study

Dear Timothy,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,
## APPENDIX B: TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS SCORE CALCULATIONS FOR TEACHERS WHO HAVE INDIVIDUAL GROWTH SCORES (4th-5th GRADES)

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### Score Range

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APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM

Transitioning First-Career Skills into a Second Career in Teaching

Timothy Joshua Simmons

Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of highly effective second-career elementary school teachers. You were selected as a possible participant because (1) you are a highly-effective second-career elementary school teacher, (2) you are the principal of a second-career teacher who has agreed to participate in this study, or (3) you are an academic coach who serves at the school of a second-career teacher who has agreed to participate in this study. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Timothy Joshua Simmons (Josh), a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to understand how first-career skills are utilized by highly-effective second-career elementary school teachers. Previous research has shown that second-career teachers draw from their first-career skills and experiences. However, little research actually describes the skills that lead to effectiveness in the classroom, and the majority of research focuses on secondary schools. This study will seek to identify and describe how the teachers’ first-career skills transition successfully to an elementary school classroom.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things as a second-career teacher:

1.) Participate in a semi-structured interview that will be audio-recorded (1 hour).
2.) Email/share weekly lesson plans (minimal time to send to me since these are already required by the school).
3.) Maintain a reflective journal to be completed at least once a week for the duration of the data collection procedures in this study (8-10 weeks; 20-30 minutes per week).
4.) Participate in member checking, which involves the review of data to check for the researcher’s accuracy in the interpretation of the collected data (less than 1 hour).
If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things as a school principal:

1.) Participate in a semi-structured interview that will be audio-recorded (1 hour).
2.) Participate in a focus group involving other principals and district academic coaches (1 hour).
3.) Participate in member checking, which involves the review of data to check for the researcher’s accuracy in the interpretation of the collected data (less than 1 hour).

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things as an academic coach:

1.) Participate in a focus group involving school principals and district academic coaches (1 hour).
2.) Participate in member checking, which involves the review of data to check for the researcher’s accuracy in the interpretation of the collected data (less than 1 hour).

All data collection procedures are confidential and pseudonyms will be used for each participant.

**Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:**
The risks involved in this study are minimal, no more than the participant would encounter in everyday life.

The benefits to participation are improvements to teacher professional development, which can potentially lead to an increase in student learning. Participants (second-career teachers, principals, and academic coaches) could develop an appreciation for the skills and experiences of second-career teachers in their schools/district; however, this benefit is not guaranteed. Therefore, participants are not ensured a direct benefit from this study.

**Compensation:**

As a second-career teacher participant you will receive a $50 gift card for taking part in this study, since you will be asked to complete an interview, maintain a reflective journal, and provide copies of lesson plans.

As a school principal or district academic coach you will receive a $25 gift card for taking part in an individual interview and/or focus group.

Disbursement of payment will occur upon the completion of your required task(s).
Confidentiality:
The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records.

Pseudonyms will be used for all participants. The information shared in the enlistment questionnaire regarding your years of experience, teaching assignment, undergraduate degree, and first career background will be reported in the study, but all of this information will be attached to the pseudonym. Audio recordings will only be accessed by the researcher as well as an outside person who will transcribe all recordings. All electronic data will be password protected, and all paper documents will be stored and secured in a safe. Due to the nature of a focus group, the researcher cannot assure that members of the group maintain confidentiality. Upon completion of this study, all data will be destroyed after three years. However, parts of this study may be submitted for publication in a scholarly journal.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study:
If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address or phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Contacts and Questions:
The researcher conducting this study is Timothy Joshua Simmons (Josh). You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at simmonsj@jcschools.org or (423)220-6538.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Carter 134, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.
Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

□ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study

Signature:__________________________________________ Date: ______________

Signature of Investigator: _____________________________ Date: ______________
APPENDIX D: FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1.) Please tell me a little about yourself, your educational experience, and your educational philosophy.

2.) Describe the skills and qualities of an effective teacher.

3.) How would you describe the readiness of teachers entering the profession?

4.) What shortcomings, if any, do you see in teacher education programs and professional development?

5.) How would you describe your experiences working with second-career teachers?

6.) What differences, if any, do you see in the skill set of second-career teachers compared to first-career teachers?

7.) How, if at all, do you utilize the unique skills of second-career teachers?

8.) What are the benefits, if any, to having second-career teachers employed at your school?

9.) What challenges, if any, exist in the hiring and retaining of second-career teachers?
APPENDIX E: PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1.) Please tell me a little about yourself. (prompts: age, gender, race, total years in education, years in administration, general beliefs about educational philosophy)

2.) What characteristics do you look for when hiring a teacher?

3.) Describe the skills and qualities that make this particular teacher (teacher name) effective.

4.) How does this teacher utilize these particular skills in the school?

5.) How would you describe this teacher’s professional growth during the time you have worked together?

6.) Which of the teacher’s strengths and skills would you relate to first-career experiences?

7.) How do this person’s first-career skills and experiences affect classroom instruction?

8.) What skills make this teacher different from others in your school?

9.) What challenges, if any, does this teacher face?
APPENDIX F: TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1.) Tell me about yourself. (prompts: age, gender, race, teaching position, experience, previous career, family, hobbies)

2.) Describe the characteristics and skills of an effective teacher.

3.) What are your strengths as a teacher?

4.) What are your shortcomings as a teacher?

5.) What factors influenced your career change to elementary education?

6.) How would you describe your teacher education experience?

7.) What challenges, if any, did you face during your teacher education training?

8.) How has your first-career experience influenced you as a teacher?

9.) Describe how you utilize skills in the classroom that were developed in your first-career work experience and coursework.

10.) What challenges, if any, have you faced as a second-career teacher?

11.) How, if at all, have you grown as a teacher during your time in the classroom?