

ASPECTS OF THE TRANSITION FROM EDUCATION STUDENT
TO BEGINNING TEACHER

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Teaching is an occupation said to be fraught with difficulties for the newcomer, yet there have been few studies of the transition into teaching. Longitudinal studies are absent, and little is known about the effects of beginning teaching on the teachers themselves.

A review of the literature (Power, in press) reveals that teachers are concerned about their professional role, and that their broad social-political attitudes influence their more specific educational attitudes and values. The relevance of teachers' perceptions of self in the teaching role has been demonstrated or implied repeatedly, and great stress has been placed on the concordance of the teachers' view of the role and themselves. Yet, despite the evidence that such concordance leads to greater commitment to the profession, at least in terms of persistence with training, and despite the frequency of comments that the teaching process is intensely personal, only recently has research been focused on teachers' self-perceptions. Even now, the isolated attempts to describe the nature and dimensions of teachers' perceptions of self in the role have been limited to studies of student teachers. Studies of the professional socialization of teachers, and of teaching as a career, have generally neglected the teachers themselves, concentrating instead on the attributes of the impersonal organizational structure.

The present study sought to integrate some of the previous theory and research by performing a longitudinal analysis of selected student teacher characteristics and their relation to occupational and personal adjustment as a beginning teacher. The transition from student to teacher is the ideal place to begin an attempt to understand the impact of social reality on personal reality. As the neophyte enters the work force and takes responsibility for his own classes, the ideal conception of the role, based on beliefs, attitudes and values, meets the realities of school life. Perceptions of self as teacher meet the challenge provided by self in the role; commitments to teaching as one's life work are fully tested for the first time; and career aspirations come face to face with the actual experience of work in the formal and informal organizational structure of the school.

Specifically, it was suggested that the "reality shock" of organizational entry, referred to by such writers as Dreeben (1970) and Lortie (1975), would be reflected in changes in the neophytes' perceptions of themselves in the teaching role, their evaluation of teaching as an occupation, and their vocational interests and aspirations.

Method

A one-group pretest-posttest design was used. Subjects were drawn from students enrolled in the one-year course of teacher preparation for secondary teachers at Melbourne State College. Pretest questionnaires were completed by 193 students, while complete pretest and posttest data were available for 89 students. There were no significant differences on pretest measures between posttest respondents

and non-respondents, nor between males and females.

At pretest (August, 1977), subjects had completed two of the three terms of their teacher education program. At posttest (July, 1978), they had been teaching in schools for six months or so. In terms of their background characteristics, there was nothing to suggest that the present sample differed markedly as a group from other samples of teachers in Australia (Anderson & Western, 1970), the United States (Dreeben, 1970; Lortie, 1975; Travers, 1973), or the United Kingdom (Lomax, 1972; Morrison & McIntyre, 1969), except that they were young (mean age 24.7 years) and had little or no previous teaching or other work experience. They were drawn from the full range of the socioeconomic spectrum, though possibly more from the top than might have been expected; and the sexes were in the ratio of two females to one male, which tends to be typical of secondary teacher education course enrolments.

Measures

Pretest measures included a questionnaire to obtain background information; a personality inventory (Fitzgerald, 1975) which obtained measures of anxiety, flexibility, and social introversion-extroversion; semantic differential scales to measure actual and aspirational self-perceptions (Elsworth & Coulter, 1977) and evaluation of teaching (Coulter & Elsworth, 1974); a measure of commitment in terms of anticipated length of stay; a measure of vocational interests (The Self-Directed Search: Holland, 1972); and a measure of vocational aspirations (The Future Possibilities Task: Holland, Gottfredson, & Nafziger, 1975).

Posttest assessment repeated the same set of measures, except for the personality scales, and added an index of overall job satisfaction (Hoppock, 1935) and related measures of counterproductive behaviour, attempts to change the job, and tolerance of unpleasant aspects of the work (Gottfredson, 1975).

Results

The results show the transition from student to teacher to be characterized by remarkable stability. From the data summarized in Table 1, it can be seen that, as a group, the sample revealed no significant change in perception of self in the teaching role, aspirational self-perceptions, professional adjustment, evaluation of teaching, or vocational aspirations.

Table 2 shows the pretest-posttest correlations, reliability estimates, and the estimated reliabilities for difference scores for the dimensions of self-perception and for evaluation of teaching.

These data support the evidence of substantial agreement between pretest and posttest scores for most of the characteristics. At the same time, the weak to moderate pretest-posttest correlations for some dimensions suggest that, while there is group stability, there is considerable systematic individual change. In addition, the low reliabilities on certain dimensions indicate the need for caution in interpreting the results.

To examine these data more closely, frequency polygons were constructed for the distribution of raw gain scores on each of these dimensions (not reported here, see Note 1). Each reveals a similar picture. There is little or no change for the majority of subjects, but there are some subjects whose scores change moderately to substantially in one or the other direction, thereby reducing the pretest-posttest correlation.

Table 1

Pretest and Posttest Means for Selected Variables

Dimension	Actual Self-perceptions		Aspirational Self-perceptions		Professional Adjustment ^a	
	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest
Warmth - Supportiveness	33.7	32.2**	37.7	36.8*	4.5	4.9
Orderliness	32.9	31.8	38.3	38.8	6.4	7.7
Non-conformity	19.8	19.2	26.0	25.5	7.6	6.8
Energy - Enthusiasm	27.7	27.7	33.4	33.2	6.1	6.1
Clarity	20.3	20.0	25.6	25.9	5.7	6.0
Creativity	15.8	15.0*	20.0	19.8	4.6	5.2
Satisfaction	14.5	14.6	20.1	20.4	6.1	6.2
Total Scale	164.1	160.4	201.2	200.4	39.8	42.0
Evaluation of Teaching	29.8	31.0				
Vocational Aspirations ^b	2.8	2.7				

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

a Professional adjustment is defined as the discrepancy between actual and aspirational self-perceptions (Elsworth & Coutler, 1977)

b Congruence of Holland code of aspirations with subjects own SDS summary code.

Table 2

Pretest-Posttest Correlations and Reliability Estimates for Selected Variables

Dimension	Actual Self-perceptions				Aspirational Self-perceptions				Professional Adjustment ^a			
	r _{AB}	r _a	r _b	r _d	r _{AB}	r _a	r _b	r _d	r _{AB}	r _a	r _b	r _d
Warmth - Supportiveness	.56	.58	.67	.15	.59	.85	.89	.68	.44	.33	.49	.05
Orderliness	.51	.88	.90	.78	.51	.86	.91	.77	.44	.78	.87	.69
Non-conformity	.65	.87	.87	.63	.56	.79	.78	.51	.40	.67	.69	.47
Energy - Enthusiasm	.58	.84	.92	.71	.44	.90	.86	.79	.54	.80	.88	.65
Clarity	.53	.76	.79	.52	.40	.77	.77	.62	.43	.66	.75	.48
Creativity	.54	.67	.73	.35	.34	.77	.83	.71	.41	.60	.66	.37
Satisfaction	.44	.92	.93	.87	.23	.85	.72	.72	.44	.88	.76	.68
Total Scale	.62	.94	.95	.86	.60	.80	.82	.53	.54	.79	.82	.58
Evaluation of Teaching	.23	.73	.88	.75								

a Professional adjustment is defined as the discrepancy between actual and aspirational self-perception (Elsworth & Coulter, 1977).

Note: r_{AB} is the pretest-posttest correlation
 r_a is the pretest reliability
 r_b is the posttest reliability
 r_d is the estimated reliability of the pretest-posttest difference score, from the formula derived by Cooley (1971).

Table 3

Anticipated Length of Stay in Teaching: Agreement
 Between Pretest and Posttest Responses ($N = 89$).

Pretest	Posttest							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
1. Whole Career	<u>19</u>	5	4	3	1		4	36
2. About 10 Years	7	<u>10</u>	3		1	1		22
3. About 5 Years	1	2	<u>5</u>	1	1		2	12
4. About 3 Years	2		6	<u>3</u>				11
5. Less than 3 Years					<u>1</u>			1
6. Not at all						<u>0</u>		0
7. Too uncertain to say	1	1	2	2			<u>1</u>	7
	30	18	20	9	4	1	7	(89)

Note: 1. Underlining indicates frequencies in the same category on both occasion.

2. 43.8% agreement, kappa = .265, $p < .01$.

3. Kendall's Rank-Order Correlation coefficient (τ) = .247, $p < .001$.

Table 3 presents the degree of association and agreement between pretest and posttest responses to the multiple-choice measure of commitment to teaching. The measure of association is provided by Kendall's Rank-Order correlation coefficient (τ). Although significantly different from zero ($p < .001$), the correlation of .25 is by no means substantial. Likewise, the measure of agreement provided by Cohen's (1960) kappa, while significant beyond the .01 level, is small in magnitude, indicating a relatively low level of agreement between responses on the two occasions. Unfortunately, attempts to identify the changers and non-changers in terms of other measured characteristics were precluded by the small number in each sub-group. It is worth noting, however, that these young teachers were more committed to teaching as a career - 40 percent at posttest anticipated a career-long stay - than were those in earlier studies (e.g., Hunter, 1967).

Table 4 shows the agreement between pretest and posttest vocational interests, competencies, and self-ratings, represented by the summary codes from the Self-Directed Search (Holland, 1972). These codes consist of the letters representing the three theoretical personality types which the individual resembles most closely, based on the summary scores derived from the sections of the interest inventory.

Table 4

Agreement Between Pretest and Posttest High-Point Codes:

Total Respondents ($N = 87$)

Pretest	Posttest						Total
	R	I	A	S	E	C	
Realistic	<u>1</u>	0	0	0	0	0	1
Investigative	0	<u>21</u>	0	1	0	0	22
Artistic	1	1	<u>8</u>	1	0	0	11
Social	0	5	5	<u>36</u>	1	2	49
Enterprising	0	0	0	0	<u>0</u>	0	0
Conventional	0	0	0	1	0	<u>3</u>	4
Total	2	27	13	39	1	5	(87)

Note: 1. Underling shows frequencies in the same category on both occasions.

2. 79.3% agreement, kappa = .681, $p < .001$.

3. For two-letter codes: 59.1% agreement, kappa = .548, $p < .001$.

The value of kappa for agreement between high-point codes (the first letter of the three-letter summary code) is high, indicating close agreement between codes on the two occasions. When the first two letters of the summary code are used, kappa reduces to .55 ($p < .001$), still a high level of agreement.

Exploratory analyses, for which the detailed results are not reported here (see Note 1), revealed the importance of pretest vocational interests, anxiety, and extroversion in predicting posttest job satisfaction and the related measures of deliberate counterproductive behaviour and tolerance of unpleasant aspects of the work. Posttest vocational aspirations and professional adjustment were best predicted by their pretest counterparts.

The full set of predictors accounted for 43 percent of the variance in job satisfaction, the largest contributions coming from anxiety (5%), extroversion (3%) and vocational interests (8%), particularly Social and Artistic. In terms of significant regression coefficients (twice their standard error), the most potent predictors were the Social and Artistic scales of the Self-Directed Search. In brief, the same set of predictors accounted for 52 percent of the variance in posttest vocational aspirations; 45 percent of the variance in posttest professional adjustment, 13 percent from pretest adjustment; 38 percent of the variance in posttest evaluation of teaching; 30 percent in deliberate counterproductive behaviour; 28 percent in tolerance of unpleasant aspects fo the job; and a meagre 17 percent in attempts to change the job. In the last four cases, the pattern of influence defies simple interpretation, though it appears that vocational interests and aspirations play an important role.

Discussion

The data suggest that perception of self in the teaching role tends to stabilize after the practice teaching experience during training and is relatively resistant to further change for the majority of beginning teachers.

The most influential factors in predicting job satisfaction for teachers appear to be vocational interests and aspirations compatible with teaching and personal adjustment, in terms of being less anxious and more extroverted.

The study does have some limitations which indicate a need for caution in generalizing from the results. In particular, there is no evidence on pretest trends (Cook & Campbell, 1976), so it is not possible to draw inferences about the relation of the present findings to earlier trends for the same characteristics and the same sample. Ideally, investigation of linear trends over time would need a third wave of assessment so that stability coefficients could be estimated (Heise, 1969). A further deficiency is the lack of data on school structural and organizational variables. While they were seen as lying outside the immediate focus of the investigation, such data could have been helpful in clarifying the results.

Despite these limitations, the present evidence calls into question the pessimistic statements about "reality shock" for beginning teachers. If the conditions described by Dreeben (1970), Lauglo (1975) and Lortie (1975) existed and had the impact they suggested, it is difficult to believe that the influence would not be reflected in teachers' perceptions of themselves in the teaching role, in their evaluation of teaching as an occupational activity, or in their vocational interests and aspirations, even at the group level. But no such evidence appeared in the present data. It can be speculated that teacher training has a greater impact on the professional socialization of teachers than has been realized.

At the same time, the gap between actual and aspirational self-perceptions suggests that these young teachers still see room for improvement in some aspects of their professional lives. Identification of these areas could assist the work currently being developed in the field of teacher induction (see, for example, Tisher, Fyfield, & Taylor, 1978).

In addition, the findings have implications for two important issues in teacher education - selection of appropriate candidates for teacher training, and the later assessment of readiness for professional practice.

Selection into teacher education programs has typically been based on applicants' academic performance. The present results suggest the importance of also taking into account such characteristics as vocational interests and aspirations, and relevant personality attributes. Although the relation of these variables to successful performance as teachers has not been demonstrated, intuitively at least they would appear to be significant for satisfactory professional adjustment, personal well-being, and performance on the job.

The readiness of student teachers to begin professional practice - full-time unsupervised classroom teaching - has also been typically assessed in terms of academic criteria, with evaluation of teaching practice providing the only assessment of on-the-job performance and the student's ability to apply subject-matter. Menges' (1975) excellent discussion of this issue suggests the importance of employing multiple sources of evidence to increase the accuracy of decisions about such readiness. While the present

findings need to be extended, to examine the further relation of personal attributes to job performance, they do imply that personality characteristics measured directly and more indirectly, through vocational interests and perceptions of self in the work role, are important components of successful adjustment to teaching.

Note 1. Tables and figures not included in this paper may be obtained from the author on request.

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