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A study of the perceptions and worldviews of mature age pre-service teachers aged between 31 and 53 years

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Abstract

This study presents the perceptions and worldviews of 17 mature age second-career pre-service teachers in career transition. The aim was to explore the experience of becoming a primary school teacher after a first career. The second career pre-service teachers were enrolled on a full time basis at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE /UT). The primary data was collected from 17 separate interviews of approximately one hour; over two separate calendar years, which totalled a five-month interviewing period. The interviewees volunteered to be part of the study and were aged between 31 and 53 years and enrolled in two high academic entry-level accelerated programs for graduates. The interviewees had previous undergraduate degrees and numerous years' experience working in a variety of other careers. The overall findings are that individuals who have been involved in well-established careers, present distinct perceptions of teaching, that are not only separate from traditional younger pre-service teachers, but remain as significant factors throughout their teaching programs. It is argued that perceptions could in turn shape their pedagogy in ways that are either profitable or problematic to primary teaching.

Keywords: second career teachers, teaching, perceptions, worldviews

Introduction

Since the notion of a worldview is complex, it is important to begin with a working definition. McKenzie (1991) believes that a worldview functions somewhat like an eyeglass, providing a vantage point or anchor in an attempt to make sense of the world. Sire (1997) asserts that 'a worldview is a set of presuppositions (or assumptions) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously) about the basic makeup of our world'. Phillips & Brown (1991) note that, 'a worldview is, first of all, an explanation and interpretation of the world and second, an application of this view to life. In simpler terms, a worldview is a view *of the world* and a view *for the world*. Walsh & Middleton (1984) observe that 'a worldview provides a model *of the world* (emphasis added), which guides its adherents *in the world'* (emphasis added). In order to understand the diverse profile of mature age classroom teachers and how this impacts on the teaching profession, DiDomenico (2001) suggests that it is essential to reflect on the worldviews that older career experienced individuals use to make sense of their 'place' within a new career as a primary school teacher. This study showcases the worldviews and perceptions of 17 mature age second career pre-service teachers. The aim is to showcase:

1) Themselves as classroom teachers, and
2) The practical elements of a teaching career.

The three worldviews: *moderns, traditionalists* and *achievers,* are drawn on to best reflect the careerists' perceptions of a teaching career. The careerists' are assigned to a worldview that parallels their values, beliefs and perceptions of

teaching. Their worldviews are presented as major themes, supported with quotations from the interviews and dependent on previous careers and extensive life experiences.

Method

A total of 17 mature age pre-service teachers aged between 31 and 53 years respectively, volunteered to participate in this study. Each interview averaged one hour in duration, ranging from 60 to 85 minutes, with a mean of 70 minutes. The interview method of data collection was dependent on a phenomenological interpretive approach that gave priority to investigating the participant's subjective meanings (see: Bruzina and Wilshire, 1978; Cohen and Manion, 1994; van Manen, 1997). The interview employed a semi-structured format, contingent on a series of 15 open-ended questions with a further set of six supplementary questions. The questions were grounded in conformity with commonly accepted phenomenological 'data' collection procedures (Christensen, 2003), although the 'data' are really 'human experience' (see: van Manen, 1997, p. 63) of becoming a second career mature age primary teacher.

The moderns, traditionalists and achievers

The *moderns, traditionalists* and *achievers* were a suitable starting point for articulating the participants' primary assumptions, beliefs and attitudes regarding teaching careers. The categories *moderns* and *traditionalists* were first proposed by Ray (1996) in his *Integral Cultural Survey: A Study of the Emergence of Transformational Values in America*: *Institute of Noetic Sciences* and Ray (1997) in his *American Demographics: The Emerging Culture*. Ray posited these two categories including another category of *cultural creatives* as the worldviews (or

paradigms) most strongly competing with one another in North America. Since this study sought to investigate a particular socio-cultural situation obtaining in North America, Ray's two worldviews were deemed most appropriate and, combined with an additional category *achievers*, became the foundation for the investigation of the participants' assumptions and values, which are deemed to underlie their beliefs and practices as future school teachers. Ray's usage of *cultural creatives* was not considered appropriate due to a focus on the person striving for a modest lifestyle, which the career changers in this study did not seek to do. Therefore, although the second career teachers were committed to commending and even defending a person's rights and community values, comparable to *cultural creatives*, they revealed motives of achievement that excluded a modest lifestyle, thus the term *achievers* replaced the category of *cultural creatives*.

Moderns

The *moderns* consist of two female participants who envisage personal success as a key concept for their new careers as teachers. Leading to the decision to become a teacher, they experienced bouts of alienation, frustration and disappointment in their lives and especially careers. They saw themselves as successful individuals, and had expected to share in the rewards of a significant first career but for different reasons, this had not eventuated. Table 5.1 offers a snapshot of the two participants who were categorised as *moderns*:

Table 1.0 Moderns: Female

Name	Age	Previous career
Linda	42	Marketing / journalist / lecturer and translator in Lithuania
Alice	36	Archaeologist (Parks Canada)

Traditionalists

The *traditionalists* were the largest group of twelve participants, and all were female (no male participants). This group focussed on traditional values of the family, church, community and the workplace. The traditionalists see teaching and education as a period of preparation for life—a time when the minds of children are filled with the information and knowledge they will need for 'real' purposeful community living.

The *traditionalists* were inclined to envisage life as objectively 'right' or 'wrong', were anti-big-business, held strong family values, and would be inclined to trade off civil liberties for their beliefs. Table 5.2 offers a snapshot of the twelve female categorised as *traditionalists:*

Table 1.1 Traditionalists: Female

Name	Age	Previous career
Lacy	31	Journalist for Canadian Air Miles Program
Kerri	42	Administration / secretary (hotel management)
Julie	42	Small business owner & high school teaching assistant
Joanne	42	Corrections / probation officer
Paula	39	Medical laboratory technologist
Astrid	37	Interior designer
Nicole	43	Chartered accountant
Bethany	41	Physical instructor (WMCA)
Louise	49	Co-host television program; producer, writer & editor City TV Toronto; host, producer & writer TV Ontario; teaching assistant
Erica	36	Service industry (waitress / bartender)
Kate	42	Librarian / day care centre assistant / business owner
Megan	37	Co-manager / owner of family wholesale business

Achievers

The *achievers* consisted of three participants (two males and one female) who had previous business careers. They were high achievers, tended to be idealistic and focused on goal setting. Although they sought a simpler life style as school teachers, they were committed to the ideals of student progress. With experience as business consultants they perceived themselves as appropriate candidates for school teachers, able to share their sophisticated knowledge and understanding of strategy, phenomenon or any concept under discussion. The *achievers* intended to transfer their

business successes to their new careers as school teachers. Tables 5.3 and 5.4 offer a snapshot of the participants categorised as *achievers*:

Table 1.2 Achievers: Male

Name	Age	Previous career
Brent	53	Small business owner
Karl	45	Sales manager and field rep for an oil company & sales manager for Visa Canada

Table 1.3 Achievers: Female

Name	Age	Previous career
Monique	41	Head manager IBM Canada

The modern worldview: perceptions of teaching

Within the framework of a *modern worldview*, perceptions are grounded in a more practical and realistic understanding of the benefits of a teaching career. Teaching is not perceived so much as a vocation, related to personal identity, a matter of innateness or even a calling, but rather a job that promises predictability and certainty in one's life. For two participants, teaching is envisaged as a source of regular employment and social status. Teaching would facilitate the process towards developing leadership qualities.

Results: The modern view

Linda and Alice know how to lead others. They have many years of experience leading and teaching people— Linda as a university lecturer, Alice as an archaeologist. A teaching career was perceived within a similar environment. Is it

hoped that teaching will revitalize their sense of career control and independence. Attending university, working hard, making 'good' money and working alongside 'smart' people were all markers of achievement.

Alice knew what it was like to work for long hours on-site. She had done so for over ten years in the field on many archaeological digs. She was familiar with a career that rewarded hard work with financial success and a high social status. Alice had acquired a specialised body of knowledge and this she believed, set her apart as a valuable member of society. As an experienced archaeologist, she admired her rise to seniority, insisting that archaeology provided a constantly stimulating work environment, which had incorporated regular dialogue and debate with other intellectuals and students. Although she admits to having a minimal personal bond with teaching children, she is optimistic that both careers in the end would complement each other:

> The move to teaching has really been a practical response to a lack of employment. Still, as a teacher, I will go to my past experience as an archaeologist, because that is where my passion lies and always will. I know what it's like to work for years on a project and then see the fruits of your hard work, the recognition you receive is so rewarding, not to mention the financial rewards, and I think I can create kids with the same level of achievement, develop higher level thinking, but an ordered day where the students discover things for themselves using their own initiative—and the sort of things you would push at a university level. That is really closely tied to my experience and degrees. I kind of see my students as blank slates, I do. Not blank slates that I have the opportunity to write all over, but I really hope to bring in a kind of teaching that's based on discovery, and discussion, similar to archaeology.

With only positive memories of ten years working as an archaeologist, Alice is not entirely confident about her switch to teaching. Although the change is as she

suggests, ‘a practical response to a lack of employment’ and confirms this by acknowledging that her ‘heart will always be with archaeology’. On a practical level, Alice anticipates a teaching career will provide a similar context for continual research. As a teacher, she hopes to make use of her scientific, cultural, historical knowledge and skills :

> I am constantly linking things back to my previous career. That is where my passion is; it’s in archaeology. I hate to say that because I am not one of those people who can say, well I wanted to be a teacher all my life and this is happening, because my passion is in archaeology. I can be a teacher, I can work really hard at it and I think I would do it well. I think I would make the best of it by going back to archaeology in my lessons, where my passion is. I can continue to follow those interests. I think with archaeology, it’s such a multi-disciplinary field that I find it most useful in diverse classrooms. You can use archaeology as your kind of teaching model and link it back to issues that are happening in the classroom. You can go back to five hundred or one thousand years ago and relate similar kinds of things, but stand back from that and link it to current day issues.

The partiality Alice still has for her first career as opposed to a teaching career is obvious. Although she views the skill of teaching children similar to those employed teaching adults as an archaeologist, the ultimate kudos is not through teaching children. However, she hopes there will be harmony between the two professions which will help make the transition more comparable, but this is not to say that the similarities will ever be compelling enough for her to develop any personal long-term commitment.

Linda’s *modern worldview* of teaching is engineered by the frustrations experienced in a marketing career, most apparent with what she describes as ‘minimal personal autonomy and equality with other colleagues. Subsequently, she is sceptical

of ‘complete’ satisfaction as a teacher. This scepticism has minimised her full commitment to teaching, but she is still hopeful of a well organised classroom and children who want to learn. This will give her the time to search for another career in the future. She states: ‘I have a feeling that the students will be reasonably independent and motivated to work themselves, giving me time to investigate want I really want to do— that is to research’.

Although teaching is not her ideal career choice, Linda perceives her experiential knowledge to be the key factor in being a satisfied and efficient teacher. In particular, she appreciates and has experience with the cultural differences of Canada and Lithuania. She has the knowledge to work successfully in a variety of work cultures different to her own. Linda is confident she had developed an accumulated awareness of cultures, and this she equates to being an effective teacher. As Linda insists: ‘after working as an interpreter in Lithuania, I understand different cultures, and I know as a teacher that’s very important’.

Linda considers teaching to be a practical and rational career choice. In consideration of the fact that she was a university teacher in Lithuania, where she taught as an English instructor, Linda believes that primary school teaching should prove to be a comparable career transition. On a personal note, teaching should also provide her with ‘technological proficiency’ and the freedom to travel overseas to pursue a variety of other interests. As she states, ‘teaching will give me the qualifications necessary to travel and work’. As a single mother, Linda hopes teaching will offer her a definite degree of life predictability and control. She hopes that it will create a range of extra life choices that other professions could not offer. Linda

comments: 'teaching is so diverse, it's one career that can open up other opportunities and as a single mother, I need to have those opportunities available'.

To an extent, this group of intending mature age teachers have had their career decisions controlled for them—by outside forces. As a result, beneath their decision to teach lay a struggle to resolve a need for self-sufficiency and independence, but also a need to gain a certain respect by others.

The *moderns'* perceptions of teaching anticipate a practical and a 'realistic' career choice. Teaching provides a job; a regular income and from that vantage point, other career possibilities become opportune and more feasible to achieve. Although this view is practically driven, and would lie within a pragmatic understanding of a teaching career; in a deeper sense, their views reflect a hope in a career that will provide a 'spring board' to independence, and personal freedom. If an appropriate position becomes available, a search for another career could even result in the return to a first career. The career changers' commitment to teaching is contingent with their modern perceptions. The *moderns'* view of teaching anticipates a realistic, functional and logical career alternative.

Results: the traditional worldview

The following worldview is that of a *traditional* perspective and is exhibited in the largest cohort of twelve participants. A traditional worldview of teaching envisaged the idea of a community—a kinship of people working together for the common good.

Kerrie's traditional worldviews are contingent on a somewhat 'uncomfortable' school experience as a former student in Slovakia. The memory of domineering parents, career restrictions as a female, the pressures of being a single parent and the

experience of being an immigrant were all factors which led Kerrie to see life as unfair—people in position were generally ruthless towards others in need, and concerned mainly for themselves. Kerri believed that society would declare a person 'valuable' in relation to their accomplishments and career status. However, for Kerri, teaching children is very different—teaching is a total commitment but a obligation to the principles of honesty, empathy and family values:

> I see myself as a teacher who will establish trust. I never had that myself, either at home, or my career or even in school. As an immigrant to Canada I knew people judged me on the job I held. Although teaching may not be a very glamorous job, teaching is honest and it's family orientated, at least that's what I believe. I see myself as a teacher who can establish trust with all ages of children very quickly. I see myself as a teacher 24 / 7. I go to sleep as a teacher; I wake up as a teacher. I'm a teacher everywhere. I have children, I am always looking out for my own son and so it's not hard to feel that way with other kids also. I am always going to see my family in the children I teach.

Kerri sees teaching as harmonious with family ideals. Parenthood and teaching school children are synonymous. There is no final school bell which transforms Kerri into another identity other than the identity of a teacher. She is always a teacher—twenty four hours a day. Kerri believes she is well suited to a career in the classroom. Even her role as a mother will reflect her 'teacherhood' and vice versa.

The traditional perceptions of teaching that Louise displays are the result of experiences of discrimination while working in the media. As a result, she thinks of people in terms of replaceable items—people have a use-by-date. Increasing age or failing appearance would decrease one's importance. As a teacher, Louise has an opportunity to eradicate such a reality—a reality that other people would have to

contend with. As a teacher, Louise would aim to develop each student's potential to be fully autonomous:

> I know what it feels like to be valued by your appearance, your beauty or lack of. My job is to integrate children comfortably into society. I will bring in real authentic situations and get their understanding. I can give them the tools to know themselves, what they are capable of, before others destroy their hopes. I feel I need to know I have helped or done something worthwhile for these children…so I see my role as a teacher is to help other young people find better horizons than I had.

Louise is confident that she has chosen the right vocation which will lead to the emancipation of her students. She has much to offer children, and in many ways through her life experiences, she believes to have the 'answers'.

With a first career in business, Megan describes herself as an educator of morality, fairly focused on teaching, but really committed to community values. She intends to include these ideals as part of her students' values. Under her tutelage, students can take control of their own learning, similar to a community of individuals working together, constructing their own choices about their education needs. She explains:

> I see them [students] taking charge and feeling they have choices and making their own choices about what they are learning but within a community of sharing, tolerance and respect for each other's views. I would provide the framework where they can grow in confidence, so they feel like they can do it, they feel supported. The human side of teaching is the most compelling to me. I can bring children together as equals; my values are really there.

Megan sees the classroom as a working community of learners. She imagines establishing a 'community classroom' which would include teaching respect for racial, gender and cultural differences. Consequently, she envisages her classroom as

a ‘community of individuals, with common goals’. Megan’s previous experiences working alongside an international community of gemstone buyers and sellers instils within her the confidence to activate her intentions once she is a teacher. Although some people have experienced occupations that involve a regular commitment to working over and above the traditional nine to five work place hours, Megan’s career experience of regularly working overtime as a gemmologist actually increases her confidence to succeed as a school teacher. She believes that teaching could demand more time and commitment outside of the classroom, even having the potential to demand a 24 / 7 dedication, which she is prepared to support:

> I used to work every night until 10 pm anyway. I did what I did but to be a teacher from only nine to three, no way, that’s not going to be the reality. I fully except to be teaching at school from 7.30 am and not leaving till four to four thirty and then continue marking at home. Actually I have to watch it doesn’t consume me. I see myself a teacher on weekends and holidays as well. I think that’s exhilarating in a way—to be able to look at something and say, I can make a lesson plan out of this, and you can do that anywhere you are. I expect my life and work to continue that way.

Similar to Kerrie, Megan sees a teaching career extending well after the home school bell has sounded. Her career is a large part of her identity and she is prepared to commit herself fully, instructing children in a grounded ‘real world perspective’. As she draws on life lessons and experience and teach these subjects well, Kerrie hopes to use her specific understanding of mathematics, geography and history gained from the experience of buying and selling of gemstones:

> Because of my broad experience that I’ve had: running a small business and travel and dealing with an international buying community, buying and selling coloured gemstones all over the world and at all hours of the day, I know why

> we use fractions and decimals and why geography and history is so important and especially in this pluralist community.

Similar to Megan, Nicole's traditional views are reliant on a previous career commitment of working in excess of the traditional nine to five work hours as a chartered accountant. As a mother and wife, she now presents a more conservative approach to a career. For Nicole, there are no careers that are as sympathetic to community values as school teaching. Working alongside children will satisfy the relationships she has established with her own family. Teaching will build upon her commitment to both—rather than demanding a commitment to just a workplace:

> I am taking the east option [a socio-disadvantaged / low income and high unemployment area in Toronto]. The reason I chose it is because there is focus on this cooperative style of learning something, called tribes. It creates an inclusive community in a classroom and I believe in that because that is exactly how I raise my children at home. Teaching and being a mother are very similar.

For Nicole, a teacher does not necessarily instigate definites, or even teach absolutes of right and wrong, but instead is open to negotiation through a Socratic dialogue. She is interested in pursuing a democratic pedagogy— the teacher and students learn together. However, she is a sceptic of textbook propaganda; and is prepared to interpret the 'real' meanings of textbook discourse, giving the students what she believes is the 'correct' understanding. Therefore, as a democratic teacher Nicole believes that it is her duty to uncover the 'truth' within textbook misinformation:

> When I am in front of the class teaching… I will be able to speak beyond the typed words in the textbooks. I will be able to go into that and say "guys, you know what this *really* means". I feel I have a really good connection to all

> students mainly because of the experiences of my children. The students will not only listen to me but to each other also. I can connect with them at a community level that is beyond academic. I can see them as people working together, the way I see my children. I respect them and in turn I get that respect back. I don't see myself standing in front lecturing them and slapping their wrists with a ruler when they misbehave. I interact with them separately, as individuals but with common ideas. I see myself on the floor with each one of them working problems out together.

Nicole's concept of teaching is very student- centred. She displays a progressive humanistic understandings of teaching. This suggests that in order to appreciate one another, a classroom community of family and friends and complex relationships of commonality, difference and obligation must be established.

Julie's traditional beliefs about teaching are also grounded in a traditional humanistic view. A previous business career had encouraged her to lie, break promises, and deceive her customers. Julie sees her students as the future decision makers and she insists that 'they could either make or break the future of Canada'. A teaching career would be similar to returning to the 'basics'—that is, slowing down the pace of learning, offering more reflection time and incorporating moral values. Moreover, Julie sees herself liberating the students from narrow-mindedness, describing her teaching career as 'my great mission in my life'. Julie explains:

> As a teacher I believe I am representing something here. My moral values are geared towards a passion for learning: the children, the world around us, what I believe in—what should happen—in fairness to them as our future. I think it's the whole bigger picture. I'm looking at them as not a product that I am trying to push out to university but as thinking, caring, empathetic people who have strong values of right and wrong. There are so many differences and sadly so many inequities—lower socio-economic kids. I've seen both ends and it's not going to be the reality in my classes.

Teaching moral values, empathy and a sense of perspective is important for Julie, especially because she has experienced the egocentric nature of big business, and a need for empathy and perspective as a businesswoman was thus absent. As a teacher, she considers the affective domain of education as her fundamental duty to prioritize:

> I want to raise awareness in kids to look outside themselves—how everything they do affects someone else. It's not all about beating the Jones and getting better, it's about being who you can be and by following your path at what you need to do and understanding that if you are going to be an artist etc—that's okay—instead of being focused on owning a house in a big park somewhere.

Julie displays the motivation to teach justice and values to the children. She also expects her students to understand such a mission. She suggests that life and career experiences have given her a clearer perspective of 'reality', which she is certain, will be appreciated and welcomed by the students. Julie intends to use her perspectives sensitively with parents also; although Julie accepts that some parents might misunderstand her intentions as a second career teacher:

> They [students] are not in a box and can't get out. Some kids think in a different way and to think in a different way is okay with me. And that's going to make a difference in how they perceive themselves. I hope parents will understand that. It's difficult, as you could be messing with parenting, and that is like religion—most people just don't go there. I have my own philosophy and I would try and say that in my class; this is what I believe in and as the teacher, this is what it's going to be like.

Julie is clear about her intention. She is prepared to 'lock horns' with those who may be ignorant to alternate ways of thinking about learning. Moreover, Julie anticipates neither the students, nor the parents will necessarily give her the credit for the advanced skills and insights she brings to the classroom:

> They might not even realise if I was or I wasn't a good teacher. If a child is having difficulty with experiencing a connection that suddenly works for them, they would have a better feeling about going to school; they would have a better feeling about themselves. You know it doesn't matter, you don't have to be everything, but you are gaining knowledge and one day it may connect and create something else. I didn't make a connection when I first played cricket, so there is consistency that applies to all of them.

Julie's worldviews are grounded in the hope that her school students will ultimately connect their total experiences, and in doing so, will construct their own understandings of life and learning. Julie's role is that of a guide. Traditional pedagogical skills are not important to Julie; rather she perceives a holistic awareness of education. The school and teacher both contribute to the child's education. Julie is adamant that she is not going to "teach too much", but instead direct and show the way, steering the students towards her knowledge and understanding.

As a teacher, Lacy believes in a community of learners. She is sceptical of top down authority because it represents bureaucracy and breeds intolerance to the different needs of individuals who although part of the community, are often silenced because of their demeanour. Lacy experienced the harmful reality of bureaucracy as a journalist; consequently, there is little chance she will accept its 'damaging' effects as a teacher. Lacy is determined to create a classroom environment where individuals learn at their own pace and at their own cognitive level without being pushed too fast by the authority figures. Lacy explains**:**

> I am a validator—a teacher who will endorse every child's experiences; because my own experiences were never appreciated, either at school or in journalism. It took one kid in grade six to remind me so much of me that it was almost too painful. To watch him being constantly hurried by the teachers was

> like watching me. That is not going to happen with my students, they will learn in their own time.

Using her past negative experiences as a point of reference, Lacy is determined to exploit her authority as a teacher— but to liberate the students from the influence of 'other' authority figures. She intends to give her students the personal recognition, and support they deserve as individual souls. Lacy is especially focussed on students who are labelled as 'problem children'. Without Lacy these students might be misplaced and forgotten:

> As a teacher, I see myself more of a rescuer. Growing up I had a terrible experience with school. I had a learning disability that was never really diagnosed and I was always the one at the back of the class daydreaming. No teacher ever really found me; I never spoke up for myself. Maybe that's how I made the mistake of becoming a journalist— I was ignored for having a different system of understanding. As a teacher, I am going to find that kid who is sitting in that last seat in the last row and who thinks they are invisible. So when I think of myself as a teacher, I think of myself as one of those kids. When I see myself in the classroom I try to be the teacher I never had.

Lacy's perceptions are contingent on her regrets. If Lacy had experienced a caring and individualised education as a school student, her self-concept and self esteem would have been better. She now perceives herself as a 'rescuer'—a teacher that relies on intuition and thrives on regrets. Lacy's mission as a teacher is to bestow praise and recognition on the students, and above all raise the self-esteem of her students. This would mean a continual responsibility to discover the 'unnoticed child' and then foster their self-confidence. Lacy's mission is clear:

> I will find those kids who are awkward, who don't fit it, who don't have friends. Socially they are misfits. I can then make everyone else see what I see, like turn that kid around. Not to make him popular but to make him accepted

> and to let others see. I guess I don't see myself as a teacher, but I see myself as a validator and I want to validate everyone's experience. I want to find that kid who has decided school is not for them; that depressed kid or the kid who doesn't fit in. I see myself as a teacher who can see things other people don't see. I use that and sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. I see myself as someone who has had a personal experience, which has given me insight into behaviour that other people just dismiss. The kid who is staring out the window is really crying out for attention and that is how I see myself.

Lacy's view of teaching is grounded in traditional values of personal commitment and dedication. At the same time, based on what she has already experienced in schools, a teaching career does not as yet mirror her traditional expectations. Lacy admits that she still does not fully identify with the profession, which she calls 'a hierarchy of decision making'; although she believes teaching will be more akin to her perspective compared to any other career choice.

Lacy is wary of what she considers 'persuasions' in teaching, that is, outside political mandates that could influence her pedagogical intentions. For Lacy, any form of work politics has a hidden agenda. She states: 'work politics forces people to play by another set of rules and are therefore not actually democratic'. As a future teacher, Lacy expects political persuasions might attempt to alter her beliefs about children, but unlike journalism; however, as a teacher it will be easier to, 'play along with their political games'. Although the teaching profession is predisposed to political agendas, she intends to ignore the politics. Lacy explains:

> I will simply close the classroom door and get on with the task of teaching children the way I know. The fact is I'm here for the children's needs and no one else. In the business world, the politics was my job; I mostly worked for the benefit of bureaucracy; I won't be repeating that as a teacher

Lacy believes teaching should be reflective of children's needs (not an unreasonable perception by any means) and not, as she suggests: 'about attending endless staff meetings.' She sees these requirements as, 'unnecessary time wasters', removing her from the students. Attending staff meetings are 'outside' the classroom; they will always represent 'bureaucratic interference.'

Lacy insists that she will ignore any teaching evaluations made by her teaching colleagues and principal which assess her teaching ability. She sees this as a time waster and considers such evaluations as irrelevant dogma. Lacy explains:

> Those in senior positions, their advice and suggestions are irrelevant, misguided and unimportant to me. As the teacher, I am the one who will know my students, their needs and where they have come from in their lives. I would not reflect for one second on their opinions; how they view my teaching. On what basis would I need to?

Lacy is adamant that good teaching practice will reflect her concern for the welfare of all the students. For this reason she vows: 'I would only ever be held accountable to the children and never a school's philosophy'.

As a teacher, Astrid wants to be perceived by the wider public as a role model—one who leads by example and not by words. She views her future teaching responsibility as one to inspire the students with, as she states, 'the most important values in life'. Although she considered academic achievement a goal to strive for, this would only be of secondary importance. Rather, she envisaged her role as a teacher to be about developing the reliability and honesty of her students:

> As a teacher I model what I teach. I teach kids to be just decent people… by showing them and not by telling them to be good. Helping them to realise there is so much more—like honesty and reliability. I just find that after going

> through it myself, you have to sift through the rubble and rubbish and helping them learn to do that is how I would run my classroom—help them see what's really important in life. If it's just to teach them to be real—true to themselves and other people and not buy into all the crap.

Astrid equates school teaching to 'living a life of honesty' and expects the students to model such principles. By reinforcing their self-esteem and potential as learners, she would protect, raise and reinforce their individuality. As a result, she anticipates teaching to be holistic and relevant to the lives of each student; therefore, assessment is irrelevant:

> If the students are not academically inclined and they are just not going to get that concept, but they are real; they know what is right and what's wrong ethically, and they have a good sense of self-esteem—then forget the A. I mean they are already there. I think it's very important to do both, but self-esteem, life skills are more important. The love of learning is important as it brings security to their lives. It's the learning that's important, not the end result. If they like to learn and they are just not getting that 'A' immediately, then that's okay with me; it might come at some point.

Astrid envisaged her prospective teaching career to be, as she states, 'an honest progression of doing something real.' She believes that teachers should be true to themselves, that is, they should practice their personal values and strive to show their students the benefit of doing so. Astrid perceives a teaching career to be the result of a sincere and genuine decision to being true to one's self:

> I don't think you can fake being a teacher… can't completely fake it, although I know many teachers do just that. If being a teacher is a performance, which means getting the kids' attention, well that is a performance. For me being up in front of a group of kids isn't going to be a performance; it is being yourself. But as far as performing in terms of being what you're not, you can't pull that off; they [students] would know.

Astrid's caution lies in the belief that teachers are potentially manipulative. As supervisors of children and with a strategy to employ a political agenda, school teachers often conceal their manipulation. Their aim is to socialise, not liberate their students. The teacher and the student, according to Astrid, should be a free and self-determining agent.

Paula's traditional views of teaching flow from the cultural influences of previous schooling in Hong Kong during the 1980s where she attended high school. She recounts a stressful environment of cultural expectations, which involved a focus on students attaining high grades and the concentrated competition with peers:

> With my schooling in Hong Kong, I saw teachers that I would not want to be like. My first 18 years of schooling was not in Canada, but in Hong Kong. It was a different system, very competitive. If you are not doing so well, then you hear about it, not just from the teacher but your classmates as well. In that environment your self-esteem is really low. When I came to Canada, I had two years here and I could see the difference immediately. The environment is very encouraging. It's totally different and I like that kind of set-up for school. I like the environment where kids are encouraged to think for themselves. It's not just drill and times table—memorise a history lesson and regurgitate it. I can see that to be good citizens, the students need to think more and that's how I am going to teach my students.

Paula's experiences and perceptions are representative of what Mak (1999) describes as typical of the educational system in Hong Kong during the mid to late 1980s. Mak notes that education, like other domains of work, was spurred on by the drive for efficiency and the expansion of what would be an elitist system of education. As a former student in Hong Kong, Paula perceptions are reflective of the cultural expectations of schooling in Hong Kong—education for a prosperous economy.

Critical thinking and discipline is deeply embedded in the pedagogical perceptions of Paula. Although she admits that in the Canadian system of education, the students have a greater amount of individual freedom, giving them time to imagine and reflect, and without as many limitations from the state. This style of education is foreign to the education system in Hong Kong. As a teacher, she expects to produce students who are 'good citizens with good morals'. Paula admits that she can achieve this only by implementing a disciplined pedagogy. She expects that a disciplined pedagogy would result in having to cautiously manage the behaviour of certain students and it would be at those times when she would be required to unleash her authority in the classroom—executing strict discipline methods to retrain the students. But implementing classroom management procedures would be aimed at enriching the students' moral value system and potential as learners. Paula explains:

> There are some things that I don't like about schools in Canada—the discipline—there is just not enough. I'm not saying that all the kids should have strict routines and school rules, but a little bit more discipline makes you mature. So you can hold back; it's like delayed gratification. If you have more discipline when you are young, as an adult you can wait and hold back a little bit and not be as impulsive. In Canada, I think a lot of the kids are quite impulsive. That's not a good thing. I would try to give them some discipline of right and wrong, although I want the students to free themselves. I know my ideas are not written in the curriculum, but teaching moral values and discipline is so critical. My own teachers were into drilling and direct instruction and these have their own merit to a degree of course. I will provide the discipline.

Paula presents herself as a teacher who hopes to shape and transform her students into disciplined learners. She has a definitive understanding of appropriate and inappropriate student behaviour; yet, she is also prepared to reject the harsher

teaching methods she experienced as a student in Hong Kong. Paula is content to teach within a more 'libertarian' Canadian culture of 'free thinking' but her ideals concerning discipline will be exercised if required.

Kate anticipates her teaching role to be in juxtaposition to a practical role of motherhood. As a parent, she has committed herself fully—as a teacher, she also anticipates a similar 24-hour obligation. Furthermore, after a career in probation, which occupied a 'consistent after hours work load', she is confident of proving herself as a dedicated and successful teacher:

> I am teaching my own kids all the time and in that sense I know what's involved as a teacher. Teaching will become my 24-hour a day job too. It doesn't end after class, but then hopefully I would find a balance. But I do know it's not going to end at 3 o'clock. Even when I was a probation officer I often took work home, writing reports for parole boards, for deadlines, sometimes outside of work. Even meeting with certain people didn't happen from 9 to 4. So the work came home with me and I tend to get really involved with whatever I am doing—teaching is the same.

As a parent and probation officer, Kate experienced the endurance and commitment necessary to be a full time committed officer. No matter what the career, Kate believes in hard work and dedication to the job. Moreover, her experience as a parent gives her the skills and stamina necessary to achieve a total commitment to a balanced lifestyle and career. Not every person would be able or willing to dedicate themselves to so many commitments, yet Kate has no qualms with a career that spills over beyond the school gates.

Bethany envisaged a prospective teaching career based on a traditional-moral foundational ethic. Her perceptions of a teacher are well-grounded in her belief that

teaching offers a transferability of personal wisdom, which in her view is dependent on knowledge acquired outside of the classroom—for example; parental knowledge is a foundational knowledge. Bethany envisages her 'teacherhood' as a transfer of experiential knowledge, parental experience and empathetic values.

Bethany is committed to teaching students who have learning difficulties thoughtfully and particularly students who have been branded *at risk* by their schools. This commitment has been shaped by her son's learning difficulties and the school's mismanagement of his needs. Consequently, she perceives her main work as a teacher to be focussed on supporting *at risk* students. Bethany describes her personal mission:

> I observed some of the things that my son had real challenges with at school—they were never addressed properly. At home I would have to console him and I was the one who filled in the learning gaps. I always had to address these issues with his teachers and explain his position as his only advocate. As a teacher, I'll always remember what happened to my son. I will make the necessary changes and focus on the *at risk* students, and also the parents of these children.

Bethany has the determination to transfer her observations and experiences with the school's mismanagement of her son's education to a teaching career. Bethany's 'inside' knowledge gives her the motivation to offer assistance and provide insight to students and parents. Furthermore, Bethany expects her family to profit significantly from the knowledge and skills she acquires from teacher education. She states: 'my role as a teacher is a key player to my son's education.'

The careerists who held to traditional perceptions of teaching were prepared to accept a teaching identity that would be compatible and sympathetic to parenthood.

Negative experiences with school management provided them with a commitment to 'set things right', to 'do things better' as a teacher. The careerists would draw upon their knowledge and experience to prevent further injustices from occurring to children; teaching and parenthood were synonymous—they were seen as one and the same.

The participant's views suggest that self-esteem is favoured over academic accomplishment. Teaching is not a science but a craft of love and dedication. Although Bethany recommends that school students should be acknowledged publicly for their successes, the general perception is that school students should be taught to work to the best of their abilities; however, their overall performance (grades) should remain private. The careerists who held to a traditional worldview were committed to creating a community of learners; encouraged towards a balanced view of academic achievement and individual effort.

Results: the achievers' worldview

Three participants: Monique, Brent and Karl, displayed an *achievers* perception of school teaching. Having been involved in previous business careers, and now as teachers, they intend to include in their pedagogical toolkit some of the maxims of business enterprise, i.e. commitment, performance, team leadership, analysis, evaluation, innovation, feedback and long-term planning. They perceive their future work as teachers to be ideally about goal setting—comparable to the principles of the business world.

Brent envisaged his teaching career similar to that of an empty stage in a theatre, full of potential and drama, where student and teacher interactions manifest in lively discussion and debate. His students have potential, but their potential is contingent on

their level of personal involvement. Brent's success as a teacher is grounded in the way he manages his greatest resource; his students:

> I want to be able to create lively discussion in the class, teach the students my outlook in the world; on politics, propaganda and on the world. I am looking to be able to pass on that kind of deep understanding to my students, fully with minimal constraints, so they can use it in the long term. In business, what worked well for me was that competitive drive, to maximize your product, knowing how and when to test the product. It will be the same with my students.

Considering that the primary school curriculum does not explore politics in the depth and breadth that Brent is hoping to teach, his image of 'political consciousness raising' as a primary school teacher does raise concerns for the teaching profession. Although policy does have a defined framework and is somewhat transparent or universal, his agenda is difficult to monitor. This leaves students susceptible to Brent's political agendas and biases which he intends to include in his pedagogy.

Monique is accustomed to the successes of a managerial position at IBM. She envisaged a teaching career to be open to the strategies of goal setting, evaluation, feedback and management:

> Sometimes the strategies of business are quite similar to teaching. I kind of compare management to teaching. Catch someone doing something right; praise them when they are doing something right. Make sure you are very pinpointed in your feedback if they are not doing something right. The whole process of being a good coach and a good manager is really partnered with knowing how to evaluate, that's an effective teacher.

Monique perceives a teaching career as performance based. Achievement as a teacher is comparable to winning at the Hollywood's Academy Awards. As a teacher, Monique imagines receiving the accolades from the general public:

> I see my teaching as being like a winner at the Academy Awards. To the amazement of the crowd, the award winner stands on the podium and above all gives thanks to their third grade teacher for giving them the courage to do something they never would have accomplished without her. You don't often see people thanking CEOs of large corporations. It is usually your parents and your teachers, as they are the people who make such a huge impact.

As a 'teacher-coach', Monique understands teaching to be centred on success and achieving set goals, although the cause of the success (the teacher) would be self-assured. They must stand back from the accolades—a good teacher allows their students to stand out. She favours the analogy of a coach /mentor—unseen by the public, yet instrumental to success:

> You watch the Olympics and the gymnast gets up and does her routine and as she comes off the bouncy carpet, the first person by her side is her coach. All you see is her mouth going and she is just listening right. She is probably saying you did this well, gee you are probably going to get docked for some marks here…It's the whole coaching aspect and yet when she wins the medal she is up there by herself and the coach is in the background. I really view teaching to be like that. You are responsible for making sure they get those successes even if others don't necessarily know.

Monique is prepared to 'perform' to the best of her ability as a teacher. Her student's successes will be her victory. She expects her teaching colleagues to hold similar philosophies. For those colleagues that 'perform poorly' as teachers she deems as inadequate to the profession:

> I believe in pay for performance. It's hard for me not to, having been in an environment where people who perform get promoted and people who don't perform typically stay at the bottom rung. And it's not even that they don't perform, they don't have the desire to do more. As a teacher you are responsible for making sure they get those successes. Whether a business or teaching, whether you are a kid or adult, these are the great ideas and concepts I intend to use.

The expectations of Monique are strikingly similar to those she held at IBM. She still perceives herself as one who is largely in charge; overseeing what the other teaching staff is 'producing' or indeed not producing. Her previous managerial position gives her confidence to focus on student achievement. Teaching is seen within a business environment of performance, achievement and outcomes.

Karl is confident that a career in primary teaching will present him with the opportunity to seize and utilise his skills of presentation, and high pressure negotiations all of which have been gained in a sales career. At the same time, he anticipates that teaching may not be as dynamic as a sales career, especially considering his experiences of regular travel opportunities in Canada, meeting with important clients who held significant managerial positions. Consequently, Karl can 'perform'; he is certain of his skills and assumes a superiority to 'get the job done' and as a teacher he expects to improve over time:

> I think teaching is a career, it's a job. From what I can see it's definitely one that has different stresses, has different applications to sales. But I'm coming from high pressure sales, making boardroom presentations to presidents, making board presentations to city councils to change the re-zoning of the property, constant evaluations and assessments. I'm comfortable with the idea behind this technique to improvement. Once I get started, look out, I get freer

> as time goes on. I want the students to be able to 'sell' themselves, be able to make anyone believe that their 'product' is the best one.

One of the major differences for Karl between a sales career and teaching is that in sales he was unable to sustain a quality relationship with his family. This turned Karl into a man that: 'was a stranger— my own family couldn't recognise me':

> Even my wife couldn't relate to me anymore. After I began soul searching and considering the aspects of my current job, I began to wonder how I could continue working for a business but also be there for my family as well. Man, I could see that this teaching is the job for me and my family (sic).

In light of corporate upheavals and being downsized to a lower position in the company, Karl perceived himself as like a pawn being moved from one position to the next; thus, he could never be too sure of his work role. Karl perceives teaching to be a secure and safe career choice, and the cause of his kudos will be in the recognition of his ability to perform in front of his students with confidence. Teaching would offer Karl a similar career environment where he can employ his skills and knowledge as a salesman, offering him long-term security and optimism for his own future and family's expectations as a father and husband.

Approaching a teaching career from an *achiever's* worldview is a foundational perception of teaching. The career changers imagine themselves in a comparable work environment to a first career and within the context of a teaching environment. They present themselves as individuals first, who have an eagerness to connect their successful first careers with a teaching career. They are determined to transfer their personal experiences and knowledge for the 'greater good' of the students. They are pro-active and autonomous individuals with an expected successful future. Using their personal experiences, skills and knowledge gained in the 'business world', they are

more than ready to contribute to a career that would complement their family relationships and responsibilities. Furthermore, they are looking forward to delivering an appealing and relevant education, based on career experience, academic attainment, goal setting, management and high-quality presentation.

Discussion

This study investigated the perceptions and experiences of 17 mature age second-career pre-service teachers. The aim was to understand the experience of becoming a primary school teacher after a first career. The participants were placed within three worldviews: *moderns, traditionalists* and *achievers.* The worldviews were helpful for making transparent the participant's understandings of pedagogy.

The worldviews and perceptions of mature age second-career pre-service teachers in career transition are yet to be considered significant by teacher education or school leaders. This is somewhat of a paradox considering that all teachers impress their ideals, perceptions and beliefs upon children. Perceptions are particularly important resources for understanding and analysing conflicts when differences divide groups. As conflict resolution processes are themselves influenced by one's perceptions, it is important to be conscious of and responsive to the particular worldviews on which second career teachers ground their pedagogical perceptions and intentions.

The implications for mature age second career teachers who hold to *modern* perceptions of teaching include the following:

- A short term teaching career dependent on economic conditions.
- A tendency to focus on personal achievement and success.
- More inclined to accept, rather than critique educational policy.
- Teaching is a means to an end, rather than a personal investment of 'self'.

The implications for mature age second career teachers who hold to *traditional* perceptions of teaching include the following:

- Inclined to possess negative perceptions of a 'secular' teaching experience.
- A tendency to 'go it alone' as teachers.
- A focus on the family.
- Inclined to teach 'high' (moral / political) values.
- Their career longevity contingent to personal values and beliefs.

The implications for mature age second career teachers who hold to *achievers* perceptions of teaching include the following:

- Practices, strengths and achievements that are successful and relevant in business careers are anticipated to be successful and appropriate for a teaching career.
- Teaching is seen as a 'technical' field of practice which can be reduced to prescriptions or 'recipes.'
- The potential to over-evaluate students.
- Anti-routine: achievers do not believe that 'good' progress is accomplished through routine and / or revision, although primary teaching encompasses these two elements.
- A bias towards business ideals: a desire to transfer the 'good' practices of business enterprise to the practice of teaching.
- Teaching is understood as preparing students to use knowledge.

It is hoped that the worldviews and perceptions of 17 mature age second careerists to primary teaching draws more attention from policy makers besides the implementation of teaching programs with more flexible pathways to enter the profession. Recommendations for school policy and practice could include establishing a comprehensive orientation and induction process, a formal mentorship program that provides ongoing support and recognition for the motives and perceptions of mature age second careerists to primary teaching.

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