Reverberations of a Previous Career as Reflected in Personal Blogs of Career Switchers into Teaching

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Abstract

Those who choose teaching as a second career bring with them a "dowry" from their former career including: work experience, distinctive organizational culture, professional knowledge, competences and skills, and experience working under managers. These skills and competences may play a distinctive role in the professional socialization process of second career teachers. Qualitative research was used to perform content analysis of 1,298 reflective blogs' posts written by 98 second career teachers during their first year of teaching in secondary education in Israel. The findings yielded two main themes: (1) Reverberations of the former career in the second career including two sub-categories: (a) Former career as a teaching benefactor and (b) Former career as a hindrance to successful shift to teaching; and (2) Expressions of parenting as a former career. The discussion section presents some practical implication for teacher educators and high-schools' principals for a quality professional integration of second career teachers in to teaching.

Keywords: second career, teaching, blogs, professional identity, teacher education

1. Introduction

In the past, a career was seen as a sequential progression that expressed the individual's desire to persevere and advance in a single workplace. This approach has been replaced by a spiral conceptualization, characterized by frequent change of workplace specializing and improving skills out of an aspiration to strengthen status and career development, while enabling self-realization and a balance between work and personal satisfaction (Lee, 2011). This approach is supported by an opinion that skills and abilities acquired in previous experience in studies and work can be transferred to another new career since they are "boundaryless" (Arthur, 1994). The study described here focuses on this issue, aiming to investigate which components and characteristics from a former career reverberate in the new career of those retraining for teaching.

1.1 The Unique Population of Second-Career Teachers

In recent years more people have turned to teaching as a second career. Academics who retrain for teaching are usually motivated by a sense of mission and a desire to contribute to individuals and to society and also to work in a profession where they will express their autonomy, personal initiative and self-realization (Sperling, 2018). These trainees have stronger motivation for teaching, and demonstrate abilities to communicate with students and parents, expressing empathy towards them and more interested in continuing their professional training and development (Troesch & Bauer, 2017).

Many of those who undertake teaching as a second career note that they wanted to achieve a balance between their earnings and work in which they can express care and concern (Troman & Raggl, 2006). Other motivations include a desire to engender change, to achieve autonomy, opportunities for creativity, the significance of receiving evaluation and intellectual challenges involved in satisfying social work as part of the teaching staff (Totterdell et al., 2002). These second-career teachers arrive from different vocational backgrounds in human services, business, industry, health services, the arts, the military, or child-care. Those who come after military service or, for example, worked in an elite technological company, arrive from organizations that have different goals from those existing in the education system.

Experience in managerial and leadership posts and their training in those former fields may be very useful to them when working in the education system. Previous training and experience in organizations in which there

was a different culture can have a positive influence for various aspects of the education system and indicate the value and contribution of previous managerial training and experience for teachers' managerial skills in the education system (Sperling, 2018; Tigchelaar et al., 2010). For example, managerial skills of self-criticism, creativity, self-realization, coping with uncertainty, coping with students' discipline and lack of motivation, promoting values, striving for excellence, building leadership and meaningful and experiential learning. Additionally, second-career teachers with varied professional experience in the sciences and affiliated fields create links between their former personal and professional experiences and science teaching in their interactions with their students, which help them to shape a positive orientation for their students towards scientific learning (Proweller & Mitchener, 2004).

Second-career teachers have a positive influence on activities in the classroom and the school, due to their abilities to react appropriately to new situations, to develop an approach that focuses on the students' needs, and to teach according to a problem-solving approach (Tigchelaar et al., 2008; Williams, 2013). Also, second-career teachers accepted to teach in senior-high schools reported strong expectations and a sense of commitment and saw teaching as a moral career (Newman, 2010).

Second-career teachers differ from former career teachers, because of their previous work experiences which they bring to enrich their new professional work (Varadharajan et al., 2019). They harness these skills and transfer them. For example: communication skills, problem-solving and management of negotiations, coping skills, planning abilities, managerial abilities, technical know-how, the ability to plan a learning program and thinking abilities (Tigchelaar et al., 2010).

They utilize their practical expertise and knowledge of the real world, skills that are personal, transferable, and connected to their previous career. These skills may be detailed or complex routines that can be transferred with success. Second-career teachers have also been shown to have more substantive motivation, strong and developed perceptions and personal beliefs by virtue of their previous experiences. Previous experiences were perceived as strong personal qualities that they developed in work and life and with reciprocal sharing of expertise. They also bring with them their varied experimentations and developed beliefs about teaching, which influence their interpretations and behaviors and influence their perceptions of teaching.

Second-career teachers demonstrate more initiative and are more confident of their abilities than former career teachers. Moreover, they are more aware of social, cultural, and political consequences of their behaviors, bringing strong work ethnics and a desire to serve others to their new profession (Tigchelaar et al., 2010; Tigchelaar et al., 2012). Dickar (2005) showed that strong motivation and previous professional successes were strong indicators for future success in a second career.

1.2 Challenges During Induction into a Teaching Career

In the USA, a quarter of all new teachers experience difficult pressures in their first year of teaching (Fitchett et al., 2018). In Israel, signs of burnout were found among teachers in their first year at work (Gavish & Friedman, 2010). The work burden is estimated to be the most difficult issue in teaching, and it is often far greater in comparison to the burden in other professions. Novice teachers are more vulnerable to the influence of stressful situations (Gold & Roth, 1993). Stress builds up due to pressure and difficulties involved in the teaching itself, managing a class, discipline problems, demands from the school principal, work conditions and some intra-personal factors such as the difference between early expectations and the reality they meet in the field and the shaping of their identity as teachers (Harmsen et al., 2018). The strength of the pressures on novice teachers may be expressed in a "reality shock" (McCormack & Thomas, 2003), "culture shock" (Wideen et al., 1998), "practice shock" (Caspersen & Raaen, 2013) or mechanisms for "survival" (Burden, 1980).

Second-career teachers beginning their teaching work reported that they were not allowed to realize the perceptions of teaching that they brought to their new profession (Bullough & Knowles, 1990). Additionally, most of the second-career teachers have the responsibilities of family management, and their new career undermines the balance between their private and professional lives (Totterdell et al., 2002).

1.3 Forming a New Professional Identity

Second-career teachers differ from former career teachers in various ways. It seems that these differences are connected to their previous experiences, and they influence their professional development. Second-career teachers usually act, at least at first, within their formerly held horizons, using reference points from their previous work experiences (Tigchelaar et al., 2010). Literature on this issue indicates that the choice of teaching as a second career necessitates the acquisition of a new professional identity, fed by professional interest, by a sense of social and moral mission and intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Rafael, 2007). The choice may also be

linked to a desire for security, and quality time with the family (Richardson & Watt, 2005). It is in line with a desire to influence the lives of students rather than a desire for financial gain or social status (Weizmann & Pastor, 2010). These characteristics are supported by the cognitive approach, which highlights human beings' need for meaning in their lives and experiences that will help them understand themselves and their place in the world, so that they can set goals and find paths to realize them (Weizmann & Karnieli, 2016).

The development process of adults over their lifetime is described, according to transitional theory, through four interconnected components that influence change: the situation in which the change takes place, the support network that is provided during the change, the strategies for the performance of the change and self-characteristics and motivation of the person who is undergoing change (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995). The transition period is characterized by a high level of vulnerability for the individual. This means that it is necessary to understand the needs of those who choose a second career and to help them during their training by building learning programs that are focused and flexible (Weizmann & Karnieli, 2016).

The relevant literature indicates that advanced degrees enable individuals to acquire useful skills and knowledge such as technological skills, the development of self-efficacy, reflective thinking abilities and understanding of students' learning processes through the analysis of learning processes. Doctoral studies have helped to position the teaching profession as a recognized profession, to increase its prestige, to improve teachers' motivation, to reduce teachers' dropout from the education system and to maintain high quality teachers in the classrooms. The contribution of higher degrees is expressed in the advancement of teachers' professional development in several aspects: their ability to conduct research and analysis, deepening knowledge in their chosen discipline, improving their self-efficacy, and improving their motivation. Such higher degrees also contribute to the professional image of teaching and its prestige, the positioning of the profession and better selection of an educational leadership and to the assimilation of skills such as technological literacy and knowhow.

The research described here focuses on novice teachers, beginning to teach as a second career. The study aimed to examine the contribution of a former career to the teaching profession, already during the second-career teacher's first steps in their new career. It also aimed to clarify the contribution of the former career to the growth of their first buds of a new professional identity as they enter the education field. Thus, the research question is: How is the novice teachers' former career reflected in their second career?

2. Method

2.1 The Research Context

The research was conducted within the training process in a workshop specializing in online (distance) teaching, in the M.Teach program (a program for academics choosing to retrain as teachers, leading to a master's degree, hereafter referred to as M.Teach). The program is taught at a long-standing secular college for teacher-training in Israel. Second-career teachers teach in small and large secondary schools in a variety of disciplines in line with their specializations. Their post may vary from one-third of full-time to a full-time post in one or more schools. They perform a practicum towards the granting of their teaching license during which they are guided by both the school and the teacher-training college. They are accepted as teachers in every sense and receive payment for their work. In the school they are guided by a mentor-teacher who receives a special wage from the Ministry of Education for this work. Additionally, the school principal and the mentor-teacher complete formative evaluation forms on the student-teacher's performance which are transferred to the college. At the end of the school year the teachers again receive an evaluation from the principal and mentor-teacher who is graded according to the following grades: excellent, pass, requires an additional year of/practicum, or unfit to be a teacher in Israel. The college also provides guidance in the form of an online "specialization workshop for the M.Teach program". During the workshop the novice teachers are asked to describe their dilemmas from the field and discuss them with the workshop instructor and their colleagues in a personal blog on the workshop's Internet site.

The personal blogs written by the novice teachers were closed blogs, and entry to them required a code for the course sites constructed on a MOODLE platform, providing an overarching framework for the management of the college's studies. The choice of the personal blogs for the research was mainly due to necessitate the maintenance of ethical and privacy rules (Biberman-Shalev, 2018), because the comments published there were intended for personal reflections on the practicum or teaching experiences in the specific school.

2.2 The Research Procedure and Ethics

The research relied on the collection of data from the novice teachers' personal blogs, which they managed throughout the academic year over one academic year workshops: 2015-2017. The individual novice teachers

only studied in the workshop and managed the blog for one year. One of the researchers served as the facilitator for the specialization workshop.

Second-career novice teachers, who completed the workshop, were asked to post at least seven messages per semester in their personal blog. In all they were asked to publish 14 posts over the academic year. The instruction they received read as follows "Your personal blog can only be seen by the workshop facilitator. This is the place to discuss your personal experiences, difficulties, dilemmas, deliberations etc. Present the event or story, with their background, explaining who was involved, how you acted and what your dilemma/difficulty is."

The data was collected after the workshop ended and after grades had been given to the novice teachers. The participants gave their informed consent to the use of the texts and were promised that their rights for confidentiality would be maintained in any publication of the research. The college's ethics committee also gave its consent for the use of the blog texts for the research (Permit No. 2018072201).

2.3 The Research Population and Data

Data were collected from all the second-career teachers studying the specialization workshop in the college over a period of two years, a total of 98 novice teachers. The number of posts that they wrote on their personal blogs was 1,298 (all blogs were considered without any selection). Table 1 and Table 2 present the distribution of the novice teachers according to their field of teaching as a second career, previous career and number of blog posts that they wrote, by gender. Data was collected from posts published on personal blogs positioned within a MOODLE site for learning management.

Table 1. Second-career novice teachers:	Second-career	disciplines,	number	of novice	teachers by	gender and
number of posts on personal blogs						

Discipline taught	Number of second-career novice teachers	Gender			
		Female	Male	Number of posts on personal blogs	
Mathematics	37	23	14	518	
Literature	18	15	3	249	
English	13	11	2	172	
Bible studies	10	9	1	128	
Sciences	9	7	2	91	
Language studies (Hebrew)	8	7	1	108	
Music	3	0	3	32	
Total	98	72	26	1298	

According to Table 1, most of the novice teachers preferred to be specialized in Mathematic. Most of them were female who also posted twice than their male colleagues. According to Table 2 most of the novice teachers former career was informal education (e.g., guiding group activities, working in a community center), Hi-Tech and health and therapeutic work.

Table 2. Second-career novice teachers: Previous career and number of novice teachers by gender

D · 1 1 ·		Gender	
Previous career and work experience	Number of novice teachers	Female 12 11 11 12 8 7 4 5 0 2	Male
Informal education	19	12	7
Hi-tech	17	11	6
Health and therapeutic work	15	11	4
Publicity, writing and linguistic editing	13	12	1
Office work	11	8	3
Accountancy, economics, law	8	7	1
Entrepreneurship and small business management	5	4	1
Restaurant work	5	5	0
Musician	3	0	3
Laboratory worker	2	2	0
Total	98	72	26

2.4 Data Analysis

The research employed qualitative methodology, including the application of inductive qualitative data-analysis to all the collected data (Richards, 2009). First, the data underwent preliminary exploratory analysis including reading all the blog posts by each of the researchers separately. The aim of this stage was to gain an initial impression, to identify main ideas, and to think about how to organize the data. At the second stage the researchers separately coded the posts to reveal categories and sub-categories (Creswell, 2012). At the third stage the emergent categories that were found by the researchers were compared. The researchers exchanged their interpretations for the categories and discussed them until they reached consensus concerning those interpretations and the emergent themes.

3. Results

The findings yielded variety of themes. The finding section will present the themes which may answer the research questions (1) Reverberations of the former career in the second career (the former career advancing vs. hindering successful shift to teaching), (2) expressions of parenting as a former career.

3.1 Reverberations of the Former Career in the Second Career

The novice teachers spoke about expressions of their former career in their second career in three main dimensions relating to their work as teachers: content, pedagogy, and communication.

3.1.1 Former Career as a Teaching Benefactor

Expressions relating to content that the novice teachers had acquired in the past, including knowledge and experience in their former occupation, served as a resource for the enrichment of their students' knowledge in the school, exposing the students to subjects that they would not otherwise get to know as they were not part of the curriculum:

Recently, as a lawyer I began to give guest lectures in civics lessons in school. I really enjoyed it and so did the students. The principal heard about the success of my lectures ... in a conversation with the principal ... I told him that perhaps in the next year it would be possible to think about a finance management program that I could prepare (25/5/2017).

I did a huge project for Grade 9 regarding to health aspects. I brought myself to the lectures and showed my special aspect throughout the process of teaching my dear students. I gave them something for life, and it's enough if one student adds ginger to their tea – then I have done my job ...I gave a lecture about diabetes to a student ... they were very interested in the subjects. It's amazing that each time I notice how I can add more relevant information and another good method to present it in different ways (5/6/2016).

The integration of their former knowledge with its connection to the field of education enabled the novice teachers to weave their dreams about educational activities and novel pedagogic perceptions. While they were realizing their own private dream, they also managed to reduce social gaps and among other things to contain the students with special needs in the community.

The reading of the personal blogs yielded many pedagogic expressions. Academic and professional knowledge acquired in past years which had constituted the foundation for their former career, now constituted a strong launching point to advance and succeed in teaching and to become contributing, they were interesting teachers who could increase their students' curiosity:

I can choose the subjects that we learn and "go a little crazy" with creative ideas, in order to bring the students closer to the world of science and nature... I graduated with a bachelor's degree in chemistry. I am very proud and happy that the school and those who run it rely on me and give me an opportunity to do something meaningful and large at the beginning of my new career ... one of the interesting courses that I took at the university is an amazing and fascinating course that I thought I could adapt for my students ... at different levels of knowledge ... the link between them ... could interest the students and develop them in areas that they have not previously considered (20/2/2016).

Past professional experience and coping with various events and different populations, contributes to the reinforcement of the novice teachers' skills for interpersonal communication:

During my time as a football coach, I learnt that it is impossible to relate to each student in the same way because each one is different. At the bottom line each of them needs to receive the consideration that is most suitable for them to succeed and to advance them all to the same extent (27/11/2016).

In my class this year, there are three children who have lost one of their family members, who died or were killed ...my understanding [to cope with this] was acquired when I was in the army (29/11/2015).

3.1.2 Former Career as a Hindrance to Successful Shift to Teaching

Most of the difficulties mentioned in the blogs are unique to second career students. They stem from the gap between the reality that they knew in their former career and the reality of their second career. Although there is a sense of personal satisfaction that serves as a positive factor during their transition to teaching and education in a school, other aspects, situations, and events from their previous careers, serve as negative foci for comparison. The most prominent amongst these is the deficit of the resource of time, the surprising and unexpected number of hours that must be devoted to their new career. Although the public have the impression that a teacher works for relatively few hours per week and enjoys long holidays and free time with their families, in the reality that is exposed to the novice teachers, things seem otherwise. Meanwhile they are continually reminded of their previous career and how their previous career was more successful and better. The main motive that predominated in the novice teachers' text was the unending hours of work needed to comply with the assignments necessary for their new job and a sense of loss of control.

In the past couple of days, I have been going to sleep at 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning to complete the assignments ... this feeling that I cannot control things is unknown to me. I come from the Hi-Tech world where there is tremendous atomic pressure and unreasonable hours and I still always managed to organize everything; even when my children were infants, and I was needed more at home (23/11/2016).

Another difficulty in planning, managing, and organizing time is the lack of flexibility in the new workhours. The novice teachers find that in contrast to the past, they must cope with fixed workhours, without any alternatives for change:

Winter arrived bringing various illnesses to my children ... in the past I was independent so that it was less problematic to be flexible with sick days ... today the situation is far more complicated since I am new at the school, and this is the year when I am meant to be at my best (7/1/2017).

The focus of comparison between the two careers often revolved around the issue of reward and salary for the effort that was invested at work. Echoes from the past, from their former career did not allow them to enjoy and be satisfied with their new career. They add concerns that are often difficult, adding to the difficulties in assimilating in the new job. To realize their dream to be teachers, they invest many difficult ours of work and sometimes need to open their savings which they worked for years to accumulate in order not to deteriorate financially while supporting their families. The novice teachers sometimes had the feeling that their decision to change their profession had detrimental consequences for their families:

These salaries do not cover our expenses as a family, and every day that passes we take out more and more money from our savings. It's terribly frustrating. I do not know if I can survive in this profession beyond this year. The price that my family pays, especially my children, is large (2/11/2016).

The novice teachers spoke about the disappointing salary in comparison with their previous careers but there were also those who claimed that their salary became less significant when teaching:

Although the salary is small, and not equivalent to my former salary or for my education, but something about the school enchanted me (14/12/2015).

A challenging difficulty that emerged from the blogs was the need to cope with many managers, in contrast to accepted practice in other work fields, in which there is one personal manager or one or two superior managers above the employee. Israeli culture has formed different dynamics in teacher-students', and teacher-parents' relations, this culture delivers a message to teachers and especially novice teachers that they are "subordinate" to dozens or hundreds of parents and even sometimes to their student "clients":

What distinguishes this job from other jobs is that I do not have one boss or two or three – rather 35 bosses in each class in addition to the principals, their deputies, the coordinators, and the teachers in the staff. Everything new must be taught from the beginning, although I already learnt a few things in my life, I'm not exactly a beginner that doesn't understand anything. After I managed employees and my own business, I am suddenly subordinate to other people. I need to please others and comply with their standards (13/11/2016).

3.2 Expressions of Parenting as a Former Career

The large majority of the second-career novice teachers had their own children. This characteristic enabled them to hold a broad viewpoint on parent-child relations. Sometimes, one of the factors that led the novice teachers to

move to a second career as a schoolteacher was the inspiration that they received from one/or several teachers of their own children. But being parents offers them the ever-present opportunity to compare the schools where they teach with schools in which their children study and parent-teacher relations in those schools. They take positive examples from those sites but also criticize the schools in which they teach:

In my daughter's school there is absolutely no possibility to appeal [an exam grade], and it's even only possible to amend things up to a week after receiving the notice and only to gain up to 10 extra points ... in this school [where she taught] there is disrespect, I have never heard of one hour literature per week ... my daughter is in Grade 10 and receives 4 hours literature per week each year (25/6/2017).

From their perspective as parents, they feel that they act in an appropriate manner and criticize the parents of their students:

I educate my own children to respect parents, teachers, and other adults and indeed every person and [as a teacher] it is difficult to see a group of children that behave in a way that totally lacks values and is impolite (22/12/2016).

They did not only criticize the school and its students but also looked inwards on their own selves as parents and observing the patterns of behavior of the parents of their students, they questioned their own functioning and their relations with their own children:

The main message that I managed to derive from conversations with parents on Parents' Day is that a student has no responsibility for his behavior and it's not that the parent by virtue of his parenting who has any connection to their academic success, rather everything depends on the teacher and the school! And then I thought that perhaps I was the "sucker" who at age 38 sits and studies physics with my daughter, instead of blaming the teacher who did not teach her well (4/12/2015).

The experience that the novice teachers acquired over their lives and their maturity increased their responsible discretion and they act with caution regarding various subjects, especially the safety of their students and the risk to life in different learning spaces. The blog texts also expressed their delight and satisfaction concerning their new choice of profession, which enables them to enjoy better parenting.

As the mother of four children, this is the first time that I can enjoy the holiday together with them and not go crazy looking for arrangements for the children (4/1/2017).

4. Discussion

This study expressed the voices of novice teachers, who have chosen teaching as a second career, as published in their personal blogs, which they post during their first year of teaching in high school. The process of writing on the personal blog during the internship year allowed them to relate their personal experiences and provided a way for them to release inhibitions and experience relief from the serious mental load they experienced in this year. Blogging helped them to better understand themselves and their behavior. They gained new perspectives and became more aware of possible solutions or behavior patterns that they had previous not known about at the time of the original occurrence of difficult situations (Biberman-shalev, 2018).

Analyzing the blogs' post, it was found that the novice teachers constantly reverberated in their blogs their former career and especially their role as parents. They expressed competencies from their previous careers about educational content, pedagogy, and communication skills. These aspects are important because they distinguish this particular population of teachers from former career teachers. In teacher training, consideration should be given to appropriate training for these teachers. In addition, school principals and the teaching staff should also be familiar with the background and special qualities of the second-career teachers when they enter the school.

It was clear from the personal blogs that it is very important for second career teachers to fulfill their expectations. Their blogs' posts expressed an altruistic terminology, such as: dream, creativity, fulfillment, mission but also more instrumental terminology such as: time, convenience, parenting and reward. Feelings of success increase due to feedback, and feelings of self-efficacy in teaching. Whereas when instrumental expectations are not fulfilled this is translated into disappointment concerning the change of profession.

According to Friedman (2005), teacher's employment expectations are intrinsic expectations, relating to three main aspects: a social aspect (leadership and collegiality), an organizational aspect and a psychological aspect. Friedman (2005) found that new teachers expect intrinsic rewards and in the present research too, the second-career novice teachers also looked forwards to such rewards. But their disappointment concerning the extrinsic rewards (wages, long working hours) is probably unique to second-career teachers, because other new teachers have no standard for comparison, while the second-career teachers almost all suffered a reduction in

financial rewards. Although job satisfaction and other intrinsic rewards can serve as a counterweight to these inhibiting factors so that teachers remain in the system, nevertheless over time the significance of the work will not suffice, and the low wage may lead to a collapse in motivation.

The research described here found that sometimes the novice second-career teachers encountered various obstacles including the change in components such as salary, a larger number of superiors, different work environment spaces and unrewarded work hours spread out throughout the day which led to feelings of disappointment and hindered their continued assimilation in their new career. However, as in this study previous findings (Troman & Raggl, 2006) indicated that many of those who apply for teaching as a second career, state that they seek to achieve a balance between paid work and work that includes dimensions of care and concern.

The limitation of the present research is that it only relates to the voice of the new teachers and therefore it is not possible to learn from the research about the impact of the previous career among those second-career teachers who have spent more years in the teaching profession. It is advisable to research this topic further and draw comparisons between the new and more veteran second-career teachers. Comparison should also be drawn with second-career teachers in other world countries.

In sum, teacher educators as well as school principals should consider the advantages of their second career teachers. They should understand that this population is unique in knowledge, and professional experience that can be brought by them into the classroom. Ram (in press) in her recent empirical research found that novice second-career English teachers have successfully coped with the transition to distance teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic in Israel. She found that socialization to former career, as well as prior technological knowledge was highly useful for this unique group of teachers in coping with the challenges of distance teaching of English. Among the most significant positive aspects of the practicum during the crisis, the second career pre-service teachers pointed out the integration of digital tools, as well as enhancing the partnership with the school staff while eliminating the element of hierarchy between them. This evidence as well as the current research point on idea that teacher educators should discuss with their novice teachers how to integrate their former career knowledge into their daily classroom teaching and management. This may turn their training to be more effective and their shift to teaching as a second career as more satisfying.

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