

SECOND-YEAR TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD THE TEACHING PROFESSION

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Abstract

Young teachers have been fleeing the teaching profession at an alarming rate in recent years. Staff development and induction programs are seen as having potential for alleviating some of the problems that are besetting teachers and leading to dissatisfaction with the profession. The purpose of this study was to evaluate second-year teachers' attitudes toward their profession and to determine whether they were still committed to teaching. A 15-item survey was sent to 119 teachers who had completed the same instrument a year previous, during their first year of teaching. Seventy-four (62% responded). Present data were analyzed for differences among survey items between year one and year two. Significant changes included satisfaction with performance in the classroom and a feeling that induction programs had improved. Teachers remained committed to teaching, with 97% planning to return following the second year of service. The four highest mean responses and the four lowest mean responses were discussed. It was recommended that relative weaknesses be addressed through cooperative efforts by school districts and teacher-education programs.

Over the last decade or so, teachers, especially novices, have indicated serious dissatisfaction with the profession and have been leaving for alternative careers at an alarming rate (Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher, 1996; Schlechty & Vance, 1983; Summers, 1987; Zepeda & Ponticel, 1996). Often cited as reasons for the discontent and flight from teaching have been the isolation experienced by beginning teachers, problems with discipline and classroom management, and lack of parental involvement with their children's education (Empey, 1984; Featherstone, 1993; Gold & Roth, 1993; Metropolitan

Life Survey of the American Teacher, 1992; Slaybaugh, Evans, & Byrd, 1995/96; Wolfe & Smith, 1996). However, the greatest increase in frequency of complaints over the last decade has been with lack of administrative support (Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher, 1996). This should not be surprising, as novice teachers typically do not have the same professional needs as do veteran teachers, and traditional staff development or induction programs may not be effectively supporting the professional development of new teachers (Wolf & Smith, 1996).

Interestingly, in spite of these findings, current trends in the teaching profession are beginning to show shifts in teachers' attitudes toward the profession as well as in their willingness to stay committed to teaching (Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher, 1996; Slaybaugh et al., 1995/96). In a study comparing teacher opinions in 1984 with those of 1995, Metropolitan Life (1996) found that: (a) teachers today express more personal satisfaction, and (b) teachers are remaining in the profession longer than in the past. Slaybaugh et al. (1995/96) supported the more positive trends in teachers' attitudes, reporting: (a) all first-year teachers surveyed indicated that they would return for a second year, and (b) all were at least "somewhat satisfied" with the support they had received, even in the areas of discipline and parental involvement. The present study, which followed these same teachers through their second year of teaching, sought to determine whether teachers' attitudes changed as they continued in the teaching profession and whether or not they were still committed to teaching.

Procedure

Subjects were 74 second-year teachers, all of whom had taken part in the first year of the project. Included were teachers who had been certified through traditional teacher education programs and teachers who had obtained certification through alternative programs as well. Teachers were from a large predominantly urban district, a mixed rural/urban district, and a rural school district.

The same brief survey (Appendix) that had been administered one year previously (Slaybaugh et al., 1995/96) was mailed during the last month of the school year to 119 earlier participants. Seventy-four of the second-year teachers (62%) responded.

Means and standard deviations for each question were calculated. Means were compared with those obtained in the first year study (Slaybaugh et al., 1995/96), using analysis of variance and follow-up Scheffe procedures. All decisions were at $\alpha = .05$.

Results and Discussion

Differences, First Year to Second Year

Means on Item 11 (relative satisfaction with teaching performance) and 13 (assessment of the teacher induction program) increased significantly from the first year to the second year (Table 1). Taken with the fact that the mean for no individual question was lower than 3.0, it is clear that these second-year teachers were not only generally satisfied with the elements included in the survey, but their collective attitude was marked by some improvement over that at the end of their first year.

Attempting to connect responses to Items 11 and 13 is tempting. Did teachers do a better job the second year because of improvement in the induction program and support that they received from the administration? That premise would be one to delight district and school administrators; however, "the most often cited reason for leaving the profession on the rise since 1985 is the lack of administrative support" (Metropolitan Life Survey of the

American Teacher, 1996, p. 59). A more logical argument for the perceived better performance (Item 11) the second year would be that job performance could be expected to improve as a function of experience and just being more familiar with the curriculum, students, routine, and so forth.

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and ANOVA Results by Year

Survey Item	Year One (N = 122) Means \pm SD	Year Two (N = 74) Means \pm SD	F, df, and alpha
1	3.23 + 1.00	3.31 + 1.16	0.27; 1,198; .61
2	3.56 + 1.03	3.68 + 0.91	0.79; 1,197; .38
3	3.36 + 0.96	3.42 + 0.94	0.17; 1,199; .68
4	3.43 + 1.03	3.54 + 0.97	0.61; 1,199; .43
5	3.51 + 0.94	3.59 + 0.84	0.39; 1,199; .53
6	3.33 + 1.05	3.21 + 0.96	0.57; 1,197; .45
7	3.42 + 0.95	3.67 + 0.82	3.10; 1,197; .08
8	4.10 + 1.11	4.00 + 1.06	0.35; 1,199; .56
9	3.64 + 1.18	3.58 + 1.09	0.12; 1,199; .73
10	3.60 + 1.36	3.36 + 1.42	1.25; 1,188; .27
11	3.80 + 0.75	4.04 + 0.69	4.61; 1,199; .03
12	3.98 + 1.02	3.93 + 0.91	0.17; 1,199; .68
13	3.00 + 1.08	3.32 + 0.96	4.24; 1,195; .04
14	3.80 + 1.09	4.01 + 1.12	1.85; 1,199; .17

Note: at $\alpha = .05$, significant differences existed for Items 11 and 13.

There is no reason to suspect that this particular sample of new teachers is not representative, but the general degree of satisfaction and the almost universal desire to remain in the profession is more consistent with the 1996 Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher than with more often reported national trends that are negative in nature. Further research into this phenomenon is indicated.

Four Highest Mean Responses for Year Two

Items 8 (welcomed to faculty), 11 (teaching performance), 12 (future career in teaching), and 14 (current classroom placement) were scored highest, from 3.93 to 4.04. Interestingly, only one of these (Item 8) deals directly with support, the others being related to personal satisfaction. Congruent with these findings, at the end of this second year of teaching,

97% planned to continue teaching. The fact that no mean score translated to less than "somewhat satisfied" probably had a strong influence on these teachers' thoughts on remaining in teaching. This is consistent with findings on the same sample polled a year earlier,

indicating that 100% were committed to returning to the classroom (Slaybaugh et al., 1995/96).

Four Lowest Mean Responses for Year Two

Means for Items 1 (classroom management and discipline), 6 (relations with parents), 10 ("buddy" teacher support), and 13 (assessment of the school induction program) were the lowest. This might be seen as an indictment of the induction programs and support, but one must consider absolute as well as relative scores and scores in this grouping still rank just over the 3.0 necessary for "somewhat satisfied." In addition, the second-year score on assessment of the teacher induction programs was a significant improvement over the first year.

It is not surprising that classroom management and discipline are in need of attention; this has been an ever-increasing concern on a national level. Furthermore, there is no doubt that Item 6 (relations with parents) must be addressed. This problem is seen nationally by teachers in urban schools who feel that parental support has worsened in the past decade (Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher, 1996). The perceived lack of mentoring by "buddy" teachers would appear to be the easiest relative weakness to correct and should be addressed at once.

Conclusions

Perceptions of teaching performance and induction program value improved during the second year of teaching. Relative weaknesses in classroom management and discipline, mentoring, and relations with parents call for continuing attention to the need for more effective induction programs and for better teacher-education preparation. Induction programs do not stand alone; they build on the foundation established by institutions of higher education and solutions to problems identified in this study lie in cooperative efforts by all involved parties.

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Appendix

Survey for Second-Year Teachers

Please describe how satisfied you are with the level of support you have received from your school district in the following areas:

1 = strongly dissatisfied 3 = somewhat satisfied 4 = satisfied
2 = dissatisfied 5 = strongly satisfied

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. classroom management and discipline | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. working with children from different racial and ethnic minority groups | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. dealing with individual differences among students | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. motivating students | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. testing and assessment of student work | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. relations with parents | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. organizing classroom work | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. being made to feel that you are a welcomed and valued member of your school's faculty | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. receiving personalized and individual support | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. level of support you have received from your mentor or "buddy" teacher | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Please describe your personal level of satisfaction in the following areas:

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 11. my teaching performance over this school year | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. my future career in teaching | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. my assessment of the new teacher induction program of this school district | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. my current classroom placement | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Do you intend to teach next year? If no, please explain on the back of this form.

Yes ____ No ____