

INSIGHTS FROM THE LIFE HISTORY OF A SECOND CAREER MALE GRADE ONE TEACHER

MARGARET McNAY *University of Western Ontario*

ABSTRACT. Among the men and women who enter faculties of education each year are a significant number who have chosen teaching as a second career. As well, a small number of the men entering those faculties will make the unusual and sometimes difficult choice to teach primary grades. This examination of one male, second career teacher's life story is in the tradition of a literature that uses life histories to better understand the personal, social, and historical pressures that shape teachers' lives and work. The findings emphasize the complexity that characterizes teachers' lives, and support and extend earlier research on second career teachers, the 'stages' of professional development experienced by teachers, and gender issues concerning men in elementary education.

APERÇU DE L'HISTOIRE DE VIE D'UN ENSEIGNANT DE PREMIÈRE ANNÉE EN SECONDE CARRIÈRE

RÉSUMÉ. Pour un nombre considérable d'hommes et de femmes qui s'inscrivent dans les facultés de sciences de l'éducation chaque année, l'enseignement est une seconde carrière. Parmi eux, quelques hommes font un choix de carrière inhabituel et parfois difficile en optant pour l'enseignement primaire. Cette étude, consacrée à un enseignant au seuil d'une seconde carrière, s'inscrit dans la lignée des publications qui cherchent à mieux comprendre les facteurs personnels, sociaux et historiques influençant le vécu et le travail des enseignants à partir de leurs histoires de vie. Les résultats mettent en lumière la complexité caractéristique de la vie des enseignants et corrobore les recherches antérieures sur les enseignants en seconde carrière, leurs expériences de stages en cours de perfectionnement professionnel et la situation spécifique des enseignants de sexe masculin au primaire.

Increasingly in North America, men and women are leaving careers in business and the professions to take up teaching (Crow, Levine, & Nager, 1990; Freidus & Krasnow, 1991; Novak & Knowles, 1992). The average age of students in teacher preparation programs in Ontario, for example, is about 26, with a range from as low as 20 to over 50 (Ontario Universities' Application Centre, 2000). Many of these students have had extended work experience of some form prior to entering their programs – as nurses, social workers, physiotherapists, lawyers, architects, priests, artists, musicians,

business persons, full-time homemakers, day care workers, skilled and unskilled labourers – indeed, second career teachers are drawn from a very wide variety of occupations.

Increasingly as well, calls are heard for more men to take up teaching, especially teaching in elementary grades. Between 1996 and 1999 at the University of Western Ontario, men made up 11.5% to 16% of students admitted to the primary/junior program (kindergarten through grade 6) (Allison, 1998, 1999; Darling & Allison, 1997), a proportion remarkably similar to figures of 10% to 17% reported for Ontario as a whole between 1987 and 1991 (Ontario Public School Teachers' Federation, 1990). Most of these men, of course, go on to teach the upper elementary grades. Although precise statistics are not available, the proportion of male primary teachers (K-3) in Canada and the USA is almost certainly less than 5%. Concerns about the 'feminization' of teaching at all levels, and arguments for the particular contribution men might make to teaching young children, have led parents, educators, and employers to consider how more men might be encouraged to enter the profession.

Research on second career teachers dates largely from the early and mid-1990s (Bennett, 1991; Bohning & Hale, 1992; Bullough & Knowles, 1990; Crow, Levine, & Nager, 1990; Freidus, 1992, 1994; Freidus & Krasnow, 1991; Jenne, 1996; Neapolitan, 1996; Novak and Knowles, 1992; Powell, 1992; Serow & Forrest, 1994; Shannon & Bergdoll, 1998; and Unrau, 1993). Research on men as elementary school teachers, on the other hand, received somewhat earlier attention (Gold & Reis, 1982; Goodman, 1987; Goodman & Kelly, 1988; Robinson, 1981) and has perhaps sustained more interest (Allan, 1993, 1994; Bradley, 2000; Brookhart & Loadman, 1996; Coulter & McNay, 1993, 1995; DeCorse & Vogtle, 1997; King, 1998; Lahelma, 2000; Mancus, 1992; and Sargent, 2000). By and large, however, teacher educators have not considered the particular case of second career teachers in the design and planning of programs and courses, or the particular case of men entering a field largely populated by women.

This study offers an intensive examination of one teacher's experience – one *male, second career* teacher's experience – and life story. It is in the tradition of a literature that uses life histories and biographies to better understand the personal, social, and historical pressures that impinge on teachers' lives and work (e.g., Ball & Goodson, 1985), and that shape their knowledge and development as professional persons (e.g., Butt & Raymond, 1989; Goodson, 1992; Raymond, Butt & Townsend, 1992; Sikes, 1985). Although life history studies "cannot guarantee typicality, representativeness or, therefore, contributions to general theory" (Goodson, 1981, p. 66), they can reveal new perspectives on the lives of individuals and on the social and historical times in which they live. As Riseborough (1985) suggests, citing

Gramsci, "If [one is] not able to understand real individuals, [one] can't understand what is universal and general" (p. 203). In the end, this study offers teacher educators a glimpse of the complexity that characterizes the backgrounds, motivations, struggles, dreams – indeed, the lives – of some of their students. As well, it supports and extends earlier research on second career teachers, the 'stages' of professional development experienced by teachers, and gender issues concerning men in elementary education.

Background to the study

George (a pseudonym) was already in his forties when he gave up a position as pastor of a church in a mid-sized Ontario community to study elementary education. As a mature student taking up a second career, George was not unique. In choosing elementary education, however, and, eventually, a position as grade one teacher, he set himself apart. Any mid-life career change is a major undertaking, but there is an added dimension when the move involves a man leaving a relatively prestigious and powerful position to enter a profession widely viewed as not only lower in status than his previous career, but more suited to women.

George was one of seven men who had earlier participated in an exploration of men's experiences as beginning elementary school teachers (Coulter & McNay, 1993). Group and individual interviews for that study began in 1989, immediately following the close of the men's preservice teacher education program. The interviews continued at two-month intervals throughout the next year, their first year of teaching, with a follow-up group interview at the end of their second year. George agreed, for the purposes of a closer study of his experience, to be interviewed again at the end of his third year, and during his fifth year. He taught grade one successfully and satisfactorily for more than five years, and received his permanent certificate. In recent years, he has moved away, precluding further studies.

The interviews in which George participated are probably best described in Cohen and Manion's (1989) terminology as "focused" interviews. Such interviews "follow closely the principles of non-direction" (p. 326), which means the responsibility for the course of the discussion rests with the participant, but the interviewer retains control of the kinds of questions asked and limits the discussion to particular parts of the participant's experience. Over the years these discussions touched on many themes, four of which form the basis for this account of George's life history: the 'call' to teach, being a second career teacher, issues of professional growth and development, and gender issues.

The "call" to teach

For George, the call to pastoral ministry and to teaching were inseparable. As a child and youth, he found in his faith community a warmth he did not

feel at home. He enjoyed the social contacts and learning opportunities he found there, and the fact that people liked him.

I do particularly remember a couple of men. . . . I respected them a great deal and liked them. . . . They knew me and they could talk to me and they were interested in me. . . . That kind of filled a gap, and I think that's where I got most of my affirmation.

Although his parents did not share his faith, and his twin brother and friends largely dropped out as they entered their teenage years, George stayed. The faith community engendered in him a sense of personal worth he found nowhere else: "People knew who I was and liked what they saw," he said, "and that was very gratifying." He was inspired by those around him, particularly by those who taught the faith:

I saw [them] . . . as attractive individuals in the way they were living out their lives, and sensed that they were happy with themselves and what they were doing. They were making a difference and [I wanted] to do that, too.

In particular, some members of the faith community encouraged him towards pastoral ministry. "Have you thought about going into the ministry?" they would ask; "You'd make a good minister." And George responded, allowing himself to be directed:

Growing up as the fair-haired boy in a local congregation, you allow yourself to be steered . . . [to do] things you know other people appreciate. . . . [Going into the ministry] made people very proud of me. . . . I think there was probably something within me that wanted to repay . . . their interest and support.

The faith community also provided George his first teaching experience:

[In] early high school . . . I started teaching Sunday school. . . . [I taught] the first class out of nursery which would be [children in] grade one – six [and] seven year olds.

Although George eventually made the ministry his first career, his success with teaching was significant to him, so in choosing his course of study he chose to emphasize its educational aspects:

I always wanted to be a teacher. . . . [and] always enjoyed teaching. . . . So I thought, well, I can put this desire to teach together with a calling . . . to work in the church. . . . I chose pastoral theology with an emphasis on education. . . .

As leader of a faith community, George found his teaching responsibilities, especially those involving children, to be among his most rewarding tasks:

I always enjoyed working with the younger crowd. With the service there's a segment for children's time, and I always enjoyed that and felt

some response there. And . . . people would say, 'Oh, you have such a gift for children.'

After 15 years, George left pastoral ministry to develop his "gift for children" more fully. In part this decision had to do with a sense of dissatisfaction and frustration in his work as a pastor; he was often "disappointed" that "there wasn't much real response on the part of the adults." More significantly, George's decision had to do with his view that teaching would provide him with a set of skills for missionary work in developing countries:

Both [my partner], Carla, and I have an interest in taking [our] faith perspective and the secular training that teaching gives me . . . [to a] third world context. . . . there is a contribution to be made and teaching gives me an opportunity . . . [to tie] the ministry side of things together [with] practical skills.

As well, George saw teaching as itself a kind of ministry, "not in the sense of proselytizing" but in the sense of "making some sort of difference."

There's a conviction within me that if [I] can teach or get children to learn something, and to learn how to learn, I'm making some sort of contribution to society and to the world in general. . . . I feel a sense of vocation.

George believed the purpose of his work with children was "to comfort" and "affirm":

. . . . and not just their academic abilities but their individuality. . . . I am . . . hoping to have [the] kind of influence [my . . . teachers had on me] – to show that kind of interest in the kids, and have them know that someone has taken . . . time and effort [for them].

From beginning to end, George's story speaks of his feeling "accepted" and then "called," of finding "doors opening" and things "coming together," and of knowing that he had done "the right thing." As a youth in a faith community, George had encountered adults who were interested in him and engendered in him a sense of acceptance and worth he did not feel at home. His response to serve the faith community was in large part a response to those who had supported and encouraged him, a commitment to offer them, and others, the kind of comfort, care, and time and effort he had himself found so gratifying. In becoming a teacher, George committed himself to offer a similar kind of care and affirmation to children. He had come, as he put it, "full circle."

A second career

Like other second career teachers, George was older and more mature, with a partner and children of his own, when he made the decision to change careers. Indeed, the move from pastor to public school teacher was "a major step": "My family took a big risk in me going back to school," he said; "I find it quite surprising that I did it."

I could have said, 'No, I won't do it.' But [I] did, and [my family] had to change [their] lives dramatically. . . . We went from a manse to a little apartment. . . . and uprooted the children, and Carla had to make a big move in her life, and yet it's all coming [together].

George did not seem to suffer the guilt and self-doubt that other male second career teachers often do over the demands his shift from breadwinner to student imposed on his family. He was surprised and disappointed, however, by "the negative reaction" of his faith community. Indeed, his move generated "hostility and resentment":

That . . . was pretty hard. They were disappointed. . . . I am very much an "other" because I've taken this step outside the . . . structure [of the faith community].

Thus, for George, and for his family, his decision to take up teaching as a second career entailed major sacrifices. This decision meant reduced financial security, a lower standard of living, and, perhaps most difficult of all, social isolation from a group of people with whom he and his family had been close for an extended time. It was particularly unsettling for George to find the same people who had remarked on his "gift for children" unable, or perhaps unwilling, to support him in his new undertaking. These difficulties, however, were balanced by a sense of affirmation and having done the right thing:

When I applied [to the faculty] it was a feeler . . . and when I got accepted it was just like the doors . . . had opened. . . . [I have] that sense that God has been very good. . . . that we are being led and . . . were just wise enough [and] brave enough . . . to take advantage of this [opportunity].

Like other second career teachers, George had made a conscious choice, a choice characterized by intense commitment and strong motivation, and a willingness to make major life adjustments. Such a choice is difficult, especially when it demands a great deal from a person's immediate family. Being able to make the choice, it has been suggested, is indicative of "growth and maturity, an increasing awareness of self, and the ability of the individual to mesh his or her own needs with those of society" (Freidus, 1992, p. 8).

Professional growth and development

George's account of his first years of teaching reveals familiar themes in the growth and development of teachers. For example, over a period that could involve months, years, or decades, teachers often find their initial enthusiasm for teaching waning and, for a variety of reasons – personal, professional, and situational – they experience a period, or periods, of frustration and disillusionment. At some point, for most teachers, enthusiasm returns. For George,

The first year was really exciting and I enjoyed almost every aspect of it because it was new and I was out there on my own The second year much the same. . . . It was a really nice year. This [third] year was a very difficult year because of the numbers [of children in my class] and the number of special needs, and a dynamic in the school that changed, some staff changes and things that just changed the flow. I didn't feel as upbeat about it. . . . [Next year], going to a smaller school [with] just the primary [grades] . . . has given me kind of a new lift again, and I am quite looking forward to it. . . . It is much more upbeat than last year.

As do many beginning teachers, George set high standards for himself and his students, and attempted to hold to them firmly. As he acquired experience and became less concerned about his own survival and competence, however, he was able to relax, be more flexible, and focus more on the children themselves, and on their learning:

I'm more able to recognize [teachable moments]. . . . to recognize [when] to be flexible [and when] to work with this child or that child. . . . [I am better able to] evaluate what is happening with the kids [and] look at the quality of their work.

Increasing familiarity with the curriculum, and increasing confidence in his own abilities and authority as a teacher, made it possible for George to exercise increasing autonomy with the curriculum:

[At first], I was very, very bound to the scope and sequence chart . . . and I tried very, very hard to accomplish that. . . . I was very hard on myself and on the children, too, to accomplish something artificial. . . . Earlier on, I . . . wanted everybody to move together. . . . [Now I am] just relaxing and giving permission to myself . . . and to the children maybe not to go as fast as I thought I had to.

Instead of feeling constrained by the curriculum, George became more willing and able to use the curriculum to serve his own purposes:

[I had] a tendency . . . [in] the first couple of years to take something someone else had done and . . . just tack it on. . . , whereas now I can . . . take a resource and pull it, stretch it a bit, or change it somehow to fit. . . . Now I . . . know how to assess the situation to [decide] what to use. . . . It has taken three years to get that sense of personal permission to be a little more experimental; to say, 'This isn't what I really hoped it would be, but it doesn't matter, I can make it better.'

Experience also brought George his permanent teaching certificate, and that brought him "a sense of freedom." It had taken him a while to realize that "[I am] not going to lose my position because I didn't get to double-digit addition." As well, experience brought George a more "objective" perspective on teaching:

I took a lot of things in the first and second year very personally. If . . . the kids didn't respond as well as I thought they would, it sat very heavily. . . . [Now I am] looking at teaching in a different way. . . . I am able to stand back

and say, 'Do what you can,' and . . . put it in perspective. I think that's the major difference – just being able to say, 'Well, there's tomorrow.'

Finally, George confirmed what many teacher educators have often suspected – that the more theoretical components of preservice education programs are indeed of value to beginning teachers, but more so after they have acquired some experience:

I am finding a lot of what we were told more useful now than I might have thought. . . . Going back and reading some of the theory . . . has been quite revealing. I think I missed a lot. . . . The approach I am coming to now is matching up more closely with theory.

All these themes have been identified in studies of preservice and first-year teachers, or in studies of teachers' career cycles (see Burden, 1990, for an overview), as characterizing the growth and development of teachers. George, as a second-career teacher, adds a new dimension: he had already experienced a professional "training" program and had become established in a profession. That experience had been in a faith community rather than in the public school system, but there were many parallels, and he occasionally described his experience as a teacher by speaking of his experience as a seminarian and minister.

Concerning, for example, the balance of "theory" and "practice" in teacher education, George admitted that in his first few years "I was still looking for [practical] things – things I could take and use." And, he noted,

It was the same way at seminary: When we were studying, we used to say, 'Well, let's get practical.' [We spent] a lot of time complaining, 'Why don't they just give us the tools?'

As a teacher, he eventually rediscovered what he had learned as a minister:

When you actually confront the problems, you need to be able to delve back into that philosophical or theological base to come up with something helpful.

As a new minister, George had experienced an almost overwhelming sense of personal responsibility:

In the earlier years . . . [it was as though] it all hinged on me. That seems silly . . . now but . . . you're like the Lone Ranger . . . in those small places.

As a new teacher, too, he "took a lot of things . . . very personally"; he was frustrated by teachers' lack of influence in administrative matters, and concerned for some of the children because he had "no control over what happens at home." Having come to terms in his first career with what was and was not under his control, however, George found, in his second career, that he came to terms with these concerns a little more readily:

It took longer . . . in the parish. I still had doubt in my mind; I was younger, more zealous.

Nevertheless, it was only in his fifth year of teaching that he could say:

I don't sense that [overwhelming personal responsibility] at all [any more]. . . . [I know] I have no control over [many things that happen in children's lives]; all I can do is work with it.

George reinforced the value of "life experience" in learning a new profession:

I think experience – being 15, 20 years older when I came into teaching—made it that much easier. My own expectations about people and about myself were more . . . realistic. You realize that people aren't going to . . . change overnight . . . and [it is helpful] just knowing more about life in general. . . . I think [I had] a little more patience. . . .

Despite years of life experience, however, and years in another profession, George had still to mature as a teacher:

If you had tried to tell me [certain things] . . . in [my] first year as a teacher. . . , I am not sure how well I would have heard [you]. But now I have . . . a little more wisdom. . . . Three years gives you some perspective.

Indeed, over several years as a teacher, George's concerns shifted (he gave up trying to "cover everything in the scope and sequence chart" and instead worked harder at making the curriculum "fit the situation"); and he passed through typical "career cycles" (initial enthusiasm followed by frustration), and "developmental stages" (inflexibility giving way to flexibility; a concern with control giving way to acceptance and a willingness to "work with it"). Although he had had parallel experiences in his years as a pastor, it was only in reflecting on both careers after several years of teaching that he could see those parallels.

Gender issues

George's decision to give up a career in the church for a job as a primary teacher was accompanied by an unusual reversal of gender roles at home. His partner had recently completed graduate studies and been appointed minister of a parish church. As George described it,

I have gone into teaching primary which is "feminine," and [Carla] is in the ministry which is traditionally masculine, and so we are both doing these other-[gender]-oriented things. . . . and then we come home and try to mix it all together. It has been harder . . . more of a hurdle than I would have thought. . . . it has been quite a change that way.

George admitted that taking on more "woman's work" at home was difficult:

Sometimes I feel very put-upon. . . . I am doing a lot of the nurturing things . . . spending a lot of time with [our boys] and yet when their mother's home they gravitate to her. I am really seeing things from the

other side, and it is very difficult sometimes. I am the one who made supper and washed their clothes and everything, and their mother comes home, and zoom.

Few second career teachers face such a dramatic shift in gender roles involving both partners in a marriage. Although George was somewhat circumspect in his comments, it is clear he and his family faced a tremendous challenge.

One of the arguments commonly made in support of the call for “more men in elementary” is that male teachers, by their very presence in elementary schools, will help to break down stereotypes about “men’s work” and “women’s work,” and help children to develop less stereotypical notions about gender roles. Certainly these ideas were in George’s mind as he started teaching:

I think I will be different from [other] male teachers. . . . They don’t like real books; poetry is out, so is music. I would like to present a more balanced view. I can do some small thing to be a role model perhaps. . . .

By the time he had reached his fifth year of teaching, however, George was less certain about his value as a role model. He realized he had been “naive”, and that being a *male* teacher in grade one was not as important as he had thought it would be. Nevertheless, although he had reassessed his notions of male teachers as role models, George continued to believe it was important for men to teach primary grades because of the status that tends to be attached to the work men do:

There’s still a sense in which when . . . women do it, it’s taken for granted. I’m not saying that’s right . . . it would be nice if it weren’t noticed that it was a man doing it, but that’s not the reality. The positive thing is that the work itself [gets] some recognition because . . . a man is doing that work. I can remember as a minister that when men would get involved with young children, it would show it to be important. . . . Because it’s a man doing it – validating it in a sense – it gets more notice.

George was prepared to criticize stereotypical views of the importance of men’s and women’s work, but only half-heartedly. He was more inclined to accept “the reality” of it, and use it to support his own agenda. Unfortunately, playing up the notion that men, by their very presence, “validate” a profession, serves further to undermine the role of women in that profession, and to undermine part of what pro-feminist men like George may be trying to do.

Like other men who choose to teach young children, George had encountered a number of reactions – friends, hiring committees, fellow teachers, students, and parents – which indicated that, precisely *because* he was a man, he was far from completely accepted in that role. Hiring committees looked upon him with suspicion, “wondering what was wrong” with this

man who wanted to teach grade one. The primary teachers in his school seemed to think “the old boy [the principal] made a mistake” in hiring a man; other teachers, assuming there had simply been no other grade available for George, reassured him he would soon be able to “move up.” George found he was sometimes seen stereotypically as a *man* rather than as a *teacher*, especially when “discipline” was involved:

In situations where I have had to exert ‘teacher authority,’ it has been heard as a *man* exercising authority rather than as the *teacher* [exercising authority]. . . . If I did come down with what I thought of as teacher authority, it was perceived as masculine authority.

Because he was a man, he felt he “could get away with more mess in the classroom,” but it also meant his ability to cope was doubted:

When [I am] having a bad day . . . people say, ‘You know, that is what it is like to deal with little kids.’ And they say, ‘Well, you know, you are a man, and it is just hard to deal with those housekeeping things.’

Although older students in the school at first seemed to “have trouble with a man playing and skipping rope with little kids in the schoolyard,” George noticed that, mostly, “it wasn’t the children who were apprehensive. . . . It was parents who lingered at the doorway.” Sometimes that apprehension bothered George, and he was not always sure he was comfortable as a primary teacher:

I found myself in the classroom conscious of how it appears for a man to [be doing what I do]. Like, doing story time, and getting worked up, or – you know – expressive and so on. I found myself wondering what the kids were thinking.

For the most part, however, George continued to insist, “All I wanted to be was the grade one teacher.” It was a challenge when few people seemed to believe a middle-aged man in a second career could sincerely be committed to teaching grade one; his motives, abilities, and sexuality were all questioned.

Although George consciously attempted to practice non-sexist teaching and to promote non-traditional gender role models – “I try to open up more room in the discussion [and] . . . challenge [conventional] thinking” – he admitted it was “more of an upward battle than I would have thought.” He himself found it a struggle to implement an equitable classroom pedagogy. “I have to watch myself in the classroom,” he said, and “be willing to ask boys to do some of those fetch and carry kinds of things – the clean-up kinds of things.” He was still trying to find his way in matters of gender equity, and his vision of an equitable and non-sexist classroom was, overall, developing only slowly.

In terms of his relationships with other teachers, George found that for a man in primary teaching “sometimes it is kind of lonely.” There were other

male teachers in the school, but not many, and he found he did not “relate” to them: “They don’t come to the staff room,” he noted; “their interests are different; their concerns are different.” Even when he did encounter other male primary teachers, George found the conversation limited to “classroom things”:

None of the men . . . wanted to respond on that deeper issue of being males in this setting. I wondered about that, whether I was reflecting weakness. . . . Like, were they hearing what I was saying? Maybe they didn’t want to be pointed out as being different. But I could never get beyond that. . . . I thought there would be support but there really isn’t. . . . and that has been disappointing.

George was reluctant to comment further on his relationships, or lack of relationship, with the other male primary teachers, but clearly he was puzzled and disappointed. As for the female primary teachers in the school, George thought he had “developed a good working relationship with them,” and that they had “accepted” him, but that his presence made little change to staff relationships overall:

The male/female thing has been quite static. . . . Over the course of the year there are a number of social events, and the women go and the men don’t. So nothing changed that way. And a lot of it is related to the structures in place, like the federations sponsor certain things, so you go with your federation. . . . and that perpetuates itself in the staff room. On a professional level, or on a day to day working level, there seems to be integration, but in a lot of ways there still isn’t.

Relationships between men and women in work settings are complex, and are undoubtedly rendered more so when men work with women in traditionally all-female settings. It is perhaps another example of George’s tendency to be “naive” that he should expect such a complex social setting to change noticeably because of his presence.

Finally, asked to speculate on the ways in which being a second career teacher and a man in a woman’s work world for five years had affected him, George was quick to say there had been “a lot of benefit” and that the experience had been “positive.” But he found it difficult to be more explicit, and it was clear he was still struggling with the challenges it presented him:

I have had to consciously think about it and deal with it and look at myself. . . . It hasn’t always been easy and I haven’t always been as good at it as I would have thought. . . . I am more honest with myself, I think, . . . about my own situation and . . . about the home. What is really revealing to me is that if I am still having to struggle with it, I have got a ways to go. . . . It is not bad to realize that.

Indeed, George’s words and demeanor as he reflected on his experiences suggested that, after five years, neither he nor his family was yet settled with

the changes that had taken place, and there seemed cause to wonder how he would manage the struggle and the way forward.

Discussion

What can be learned from this study of one man's life history and experiences in taking up teaching as a second career? First, that life histories provide an incomparable sense of the depth, complexity, and richness of the lives of the beginning teachers who are the subjects of these accounts. Many studies have focused on one dimension or another of teachers' lives—on the concerns and challenges of the first year, causes of stress, efforts at reflective practice, and so on – but life histories illustrate the fullness and multi-dimensionality of those lives. To have characterized George as a beginning teacher, or a male grade one teacher, or a second career teacher, and to have described him in one or another of these terms alone, would have vastly oversimplified his reality as a person and a teacher. George, and any teacher, is more than his gender, and more than a stage in his career.

Second, George's story illustrates the profound manner in which some teachers, particularly second career teachers, are 'called' to their work, and the deep sense some teachers have of vocation. George was called first to serve his faith community and then to teach, but ultimately did not separate these calls. His life, work, and faith commitment are seamlessly and deeply integrated. Indeed, George demonstrates a true vocation – a work "grounded," as Huebner wrote (1995, p. 27), "in a life." For George, teaching is "not a way of making a living, but a way of making a life" (Huebner, 1995, p. 27).

Further, the call to teach for George was most definitely a call from a Christian God, but the idea of calling is consistent with other faiths such as Judaism and Islam, for example, where there exists the notion of a deity which might do the calling. A calling, however, need not be divine in origin. Whenever a teacher has a sense of service and selflessness, and feels that "this is what I was meant to do," or "I've always known this is what I would do," or "I know I'm doing the right thing," or even "I can't imagine ever doing anything else," the teacher's experience is consistent with the notion of calling, or vocation. Hansen (1995) writes:

For [an activity] to be a vocation, it must yield social value to others. It must be educative, edifying, helpful to others in some characteristic way. . . . A vocation describes work that results in service to others and personal satisfaction in the rendering of that service. (p. 3)

When asked about their decision to change careers, second career teachers often identify, as George did, a desire to 'do something worthwhile,' 'make a difference,' or 'serve society.' Whether or not they identify a faith aspect to their desire, the notion of calling, or vocation, is fulfilled.

Third, as Ball and Goodson (1985) suggest, a teacher's "previous career and life experience," his or her "latent identities and cultures" and "central life interests and commitments," shape that teacher's view of teaching and the way he or she sets about it (p. 13). Second career teachers have had longer and richer life experiences than other beginning teachers, and tend to possess a more fully developed sense of themselves, and, often, clearer goals for themselves as a teachers. Profoundly, his faith was George's "central life interest and commitment." For him, life – and teaching – was about affirmation and, in particular, about living out God's call to serve others. As do the beliefs of other teachers with strong commitments to other faiths, George's beliefs showed in his attitudes towards his young students, and in his view of himself as a teacher. A faith commitment often inspires teachers, gives them hope and purpose, keeps them going, and grounds their work.

Fourth, George's account of his early years as a teacher shows that Burden (1990) and others who have studied beginning teachers are more or less accurate in their identification of a variety of concerns and 'developmental stages' widely experienced by beginning teachers. As a second career teacher, George expressed many of the same concerns and appeared to go through some of the same 'stages' in becoming a teacher as other beginning teachers have been reported to do. Further, as someone who had already 'trained' for and practiced another profession, George reported that in preparing for teaching he experienced some of the same concerns he had already experienced in preparing for the ministry. For example, as a church minister George had learned the value of theory, acquired flexibility, and learned not to feel personally responsible for matters beyond his control, but he had to learn these same lessons over again when he became a teacher. Valuing theory, being flexible, and having a realistic perspective on personal responsibility are probably important in any professional person but, as George's experience suggests, they are not simple skills that, learned in one context, can be transferred to and applied in another. George did learn to value theory, be flexible, and be realistic somewhat more quickly the second time around, suggesting that although such abilities are highly context specific, their value, once recognized in one professional setting, may be somewhat more easily recognized in another. Indeed, Freidus (1992) has suggested that second career teachers may learn the professional role more quickly than younger, first career teachers. In many cases, however, the differences may not be great, and career development is not necessarily easier or faster the second time around.

Fifth, George describes some of the realities of being a male teacher in the primary grades, realities that are similar for both first and second career teachers. Current calls for "more men in elementary" notwithstanding, men who want to commit themselves to teaching elementary grades, and especially those who show a particular interest in primary grades, tend to have

a lot of explaining to do to principals, other teachers, parents, and even, sometimes, the older boys in the school – though *not* to the students in their own classes, or to parents who have had time to get to know and trust them. Male elementary school teachers are often stereotyped as lacking the ambition, confidence, intelligence, or knowledge required to teach older students, and may be thought less capable of classroom management and discipline. They are often assumed to be gay, and must endure the unfortunate and usually unspoken implication that they are, at best, poor role models and, at worst, a danger to children. Although a teacher's sexual orientation is widely known to be irrelevant in professional contexts, a strong current of homophobia in North American society, compounded with the irrational notion that homosexuality is linked with pedophilia, undoubtedly militates silently and significantly against the entry of more men into elementary teaching (Coulter & McNay, 1993, 1995).

It is further assumed that men's interest in the primary grades is temporary and opportunistic – that as soon as possible they will “move up” to a higher grade, a position of added responsibility, or an administrative position. Male primary teachers are sometimes welcomed by female primary teachers who see a male presence as providing status to primary teaching, and resented by others who fear a male encroachment on female territory. And whether or not men in elementary classrooms, as men, really make a difference in students' perceptions and understandings of gender and sex roles is highly questionable (Coulter & McNay, 1993). Laheima (2000), for example, has suggested that although the number of male elementary school teachers is an issue for teachers it is not for students (at least in Finland where her research took place). More to the point, Allan (1994) has suggested that male role modeling is little more than “a kind of optimistic ritual approach to solving social problems” (from the abstract).

Finally, George provides evidence of the costs of changing careers – financial insecurity, family upheaval, and social isolation – and, as well, evidence of the benefits: personal and professional rewards, opportunities for personal satisfaction through service, and opportunities to contribute to social change. As was the case with the second career teachers in Freidus's (1991) study, the considerable benefits outweighed the considerable costs.

Implications and suggestions for further research

Little or no information exists on second career teachers in Canada. A demographic study of career changers, and a fuller study of the issues that concern them, both male and female, as well as studies of the special contributions second career teachers make to the profession and how they fare “on the job,” might assist in recruitment, program and course planning, and the design of both induction and professional development programs for these teachers. Similarly, little information exists on the numbers of male

elementary school teachers in Canada, or the number of men who teach the primary grades, although a few qualitative studies of the men themselves and their experiences are available (most recently, for example, Bohning & Hale, 1998; Bradley, 2000; King, 1998; Sargent, 2000). Again, a demographic study of the men involved, continued studies of the issues that affect their lives and work, and further research on the sociological, political, and pedagogical implications of "men in elementary" might help to clarify this complex area.

Existing and current research notwithstanding, very little attention has been paid by faculties of education either to second career teachers or to men in elementary education. Opportunities for students in both groups to know there are others in similar situations, and to talk with each other and with others who have had similar experiences, would provide a social network to help support them through their "shared ordeal" (Lortie, in Crow *et al.*, 1990, p. 219). For men in elementary, opportunities to discuss gender issues, sex stereotyping, and being a man in a woman's work world would be particularly appropriate. For second career teachers, opportunities to commiserate about and support each other in the costs and challenges of the career change, and, on the other hand, to share their passion, commitment, and sense of calling, would be appropriate. As well, instructors might consider ways to acknowledge and value more fully the maturity and richness of experience second career student teachers bring to the classroom.

Finally, teacher educators and researchers should be encouraged to continue to write biographies, life histories, and narrative studies about the teachers with whom they work, and teachers should be encouraged to write their own narratives and autobiographies. No other form of research offers so rich an account of the complexities that characterize teacher's backgrounds, lives, and work. Such research might help all who work with teachers to "understand real individuals" more fully, and thereby to "understand what is universal and general" (Gramsci, in Riseborough, 1985).

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MARGARET McNAY is Associate Professor and Chair of the Preservice Program in the Faculty of Education at the University of Western Ontario where she has taught since 1987. Her research interests include teacher education, the practicum, program evaluation, and issues in curriculum.

MARGARET McNAY est professeur agrégé et directrice du Programme de formation préalable des enseignants à la faculté des sciences de l'éducation de l'Université de Western Ontario, où elle enseigne depuis 1987. Ses recherches portent sur la formation des enseignants, les stages pratiques, l'évaluation des programmes et les programmes d'études.