

“I Changed My Mind”: Exploring Why College Students Change Majors to Become Teachers

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Abstract

Although teacher education programs have long studied what draws students to choose a career in teaching, a less studied aspect of teacher candidates relates to students who change majors to become teachers. As a phenomenon that is common in teacher preparation, I am interested in better understanding why this happens. This article centers around six participants who began college choosing a science major, changing their course of study after at least one full year. Through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, a discussion of what led the participants to change majors, what they were looking for when deciding to become teachers, and their motivations to join the ranks of the next generation of teachers is had. The article ends with implications for practitioners, and avenues for further research.

Keywords

teacher education, teacher preparation, recruiting teacher majors, pre-service teaching, student motivation

The retainment of teachers worldwide, a long-term issue, has reached crisis proportions in the past two years. The teacher shortage crisis has been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Querolo et al. (2022) write on the phenomenon:

For decades, America’s educators have said they would’ve abandoned the job long ago were it not for their devotion to their students. But after a demanding and demoralizing two years that included Zoom schooling, culture wars, and shootings, those threats have finally become real. A Gallup Poll in February showed that K-12 educators were the most burned-out segment of the US labor force. Now teachers are walking out by the hundreds of thousands, vowing never to return. A study by the

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National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in March found that 44% of public schools reported teaching vacancies. By LinkedIn's calculations, the number of teachers who quit in June was almost 41% higher than a year earlier (p. 2).

Issues such as low pay, lack of respect, job related stress, difficult administrations and state level education departments, and the ongoing politics of the job (Lurve & Griesbach, 2022; Will, 2022), among other issues has caused veterans to leave teaching for good. These challenges come to bear on teacher preparation programs, who are tasked with training teachers equipped to battle a system that is built to chew them up and spit them out.

Herein lies a major problem teacher educators must address, and that this research is a first step in addressing: how can we not only prepare our students for the challenges that lie ahead of them as teachers, but how can we attract quality students in the first place? This study is born out of my experiences working directly with student teachers and practicum students as an adjunct, graduate student working directly with practicum and student teachers, and as an assistant professor of elementary education at a small college in the Northeast United States. Time and again I find myself working with students who did not come to college planning to become teachers. At the time of writing, over 40% of students in my education department did not enter college with education as their major or program of study.

This phenomenon warrants further investigation to understand what motivates students to choose teaching, especially those students who change their minds while already in college. In understanding this better, it is my hope to provide better recruitment prior to the freshman year by knowing what goals students have when beginning college. My department finds that we have a large number of students who initially report education as an area of interest while still in high school. The majority of these students do not declare education as their major or program of study, and then by sophomore year, our numbers grow significantly year after year, with a few students even changing during their junior year.

While there exists a large body of work regarding the formation of teacher identity among pre-service teachers, and even what makes high school students want to be teachers, both categories largely focus on students who have already made the decision to teach. But the question; what makes college students already committed to a different major change to education, is less studied within the literature.

Majoring in Education: What Motivates Students to Choose Teaching as a Career?

Alexander et al. (1994) discuss eight themes that lead young people to become teachers. These eight themes are: (a) the desire to work with young people; (b) an interest in serving humanity; (c) continued involvement in an educational setting beyond college; (d) having a job with good security and material benefits; (e) having a job with good working hours, especially for those with young and/or school aged children of their own; (f) a need for a job with stimulation; (g) the ability to influence others; (h) and the need and desire for authority. It is important to note that the primary theme that has arisen from my work with pre-service teacher candidates is an altruistic desire to serve humanity through teaching. And while this theme is not universal, it does account for the majority of students I have worked with, backed up by the literature (Low et al., 2011; Sinclair, 2008; Struyven et al., 2013).

For students who choose to become teachers prior to entering college, the motivations listed above hold true. These motivations are reflected in additional research as well (Bruinsma & Jansen, 2010; Davies & Hughes, 2018).

In my years as a teacher educator, I have had numerous discussions with pre-service teachers about what drew them to pursuing teaching as a career. Anecdotally speaking, responses fit the eight themes outlined above. This allows my study to focus elsewhere, on what motivates students to change majors when they have already enrolled and begun their college studies.

Procedures

Questions and Instruments

This study addresses five interrelated questions presented to participants initially in an open-ended questionnaire. These questions are:

1. What was your major or anticipated major when you began college?
2. Why did you initially choose that as your major or want to major in that?
3. Why did you change your major to education?
4. When you did change, did you have any preconceived expectations about what going into teacher preparation would involve regarding difficulty?
5. Do you feel your experiences so far in the education program match your preconceived expectations?

This researcher made questionnaire was presented to the six study participants, who provided responses in writing. Finally, a one-on-one semi-structured interview was completed with each participant, using their responses to the questions to guide the interview. A study consisting of both a self-completed questionnaire and an interview was chosen to both gather initial information, and to facilitate deeper discussion and to gain clarifying information as necessary. According to Phellas et al. (2011), “using self-completion questionnaires reduces biasing error caused by the characteristics of the interviewer and the variability in interviewers’ skills” (p. 184). The questionnaire was completed first so that the information gleaned would be less influenced by my presence.

Allowing study participants to tell their stories about why they chose their initial major when coming to college, then diagraming their pathway to teacher education was the focus of both the questionnaire and the subsequent interview. Within qualitative research, it is accepted that interviews are not neutral tools, they are based within personal interactions that contextualize results (Harris & Brown, 2010; Silverman, 2006). In the context of this study, students within the education department that I work in were selected as study participants. The follow up semi-structured interview was the final interaction with participants. This form of semi-standardized interview allowed for unanticipated responses and discussion points that were individual to each participant (Ryan et al., 2009).

Participants

Due to my own observations around the phenomenon of why students come to teacher education, I developed the study around the very students who brought it to my attention. This was done both out of convenience, and out of my desire to better understand my own student population. This study included six participants, chosen randomly from a pool of potential participants who met the qualifications for the study. The participant qualifications were:

- The student must be enrolled in a teacher education pathway. My institution provides both education majors, and licensure programs where students have an outside major. Both sets

of students were considered for this study.

- The student must have started their college education in a different major or without an education licensure program as part of their intended program of study.
- The student must be at least at the Sophomore level of their college education.

Based upon these qualifications, the study identified 18 students who met the qualifications to be included as participants. Of those 18 students, 15 agreed to be included in the selection pool. Six participants were chosen randomly to participate in this study from that pool using a list randomizer. These six participants each identified as female, five of the participants identified as Caucasian, and one as African American. Four of the participants originally entered college as nursing majors, one as a psychology major, and one as a chemistry major. Finally, five participants were inclusive elementary education majors, while one was a psychology major pursuing elementary education certification (see Table 1).

Table 1.
Participants

Participant	Stated Gender	Class Year	Racial Identity	Prior Major	Current Major
Carolyn	Female	Sophomore	White	Nursing	Inclusive Elementary Ed
Leslie	Female	Junior	Black	Chemistry	Inclusive Elementary Ed
Ryann	Female	Senior	White	Psychology	Psychology
Ari	Female	Junior	White	Nursing	Inclusive Elementary Ed
Mary	Female	Sophomore	White	Nursing	Inclusive Elementary Ed
Sam	Female	Junior	White	Nursing	Inclusive Elementary Ed

Note. Ryann is completing coursework toward licensure in Childhood Grades 1-6

It is important to note that I maintain professor/student relationships with each of the study's six participants. My department only employs three full time professors, creating the need for professors to also act as academic advisors, mentors, and the professor of record in multiple courses for the majority of students. I have built strong mentoring relationships built on knowing students to a greater depth than just who they are in the classroom and maintain a positive rapport with the vast majority of students in my program. However, due to these relationships, bias is a valid concern surrounding the collection of data (Chenail, 2011), as student participants may feel the need to validate my values through their responses. I sought to alleviate this bias by reminding my participants that I was seeking honest responses, and that their inclusion or exclusion from the study would in no way harm their standing in my courses, or in the program overall. I do believe that, due to the trust that is maintained in the department between professors and students, that the participants believed this as true and that their responses were forthcoming and honest.

Research Setting

As mentioned previously, this study took place within the education department at a small college in the Northeast United States, which will be referred to as Forest College (FC). FC is home to 1,200

students on its main campus, with over 98% of those students being undergraduates. FC has a 60.5% female enrollment (College Factual). In the education department, 74% of students currently enrolled in a teacher preparation pathway or major identify as female, while 85% of the students in the department are Caucasian, 12% are African American, and 3% are classified as Indigenous. The large percentage of teacher candidates identifying as female is consistent with national averages. As of 2019, the American teacher workforce was 77% female (Partelow, 2019).

Data Analysis

Responses to the questionnaire and follow-up interview were analyzed utilizing qualitative narrative analysis. This analysis procedure was chosen due to its ability to inquire into participants experience through collaboration between the participants and the researcher (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), as well as narratives ability to allow participants to name their reality within the context of time and space (Nichols, 2021). The narrative analysis was completed individually for each participant. The data is presented in this article as a discussion of each participant, beginning with a descriptive summary of each question, along with emerging themes taken from the narrative analysis. Finally, a summary of overall themes is discussed and contextualized.

Results

The results are discussed contextualized within each of the five questionnaire questions, beginning with a descriptive summary that interprets the themes of the responses to each question. Due to the individual nature of the data collected in this study, a description of each participant, as well as a summary of their responses is presented here. After the description of each participant, a thematic analysis of each question will take place, providing greater context for the participants taken as a whole. Thematic analysis is a method of identifying and reporting themes found within textual data. It is a descriptive method that reduces data and provides a level of depth in the interpretation of data (Braun & Clark, 2006). According to Castleberry and Nolen (2018), “thematic analysis of open-ended responses from surveys or transcribed interviews can explore the context of teaching and learning at a level of depth that quantitative analysis lacks while allowing flexibility and interpretation when analyzing the data” (p. 808). Through this method of analysis, the themes that arose from the six participant data sets will be contextualized and discussed.

Participant Interviews

Participant #1: Carolyn. Carolyn is currently a sophomore, and recently changed her major from nursing to Inclusive Elementary Education. She is taking her foundational education courses beginning the semester that this study was conducted. Carolyn stated that she chose nursing as her major when coming to college as follows: “I love to help other people, and my grandma has Alzheimer’s, and lived with me from the time I was in 1st grade until my first year of high school when she passed away. I’ve always loved anatomy and physiology, the medical field excited me.” When Carolyn began her college studies, she began participating in her initial clinicals, which she said turned her off to nursing as a profession.

As Carolyn was confronted with the fact that nursing no longer appealed to her, she turned her

attention to education. On this, she said: “I changed my major to elementary education because I love children, and I was on the verge all year of changing my major. I attended a 4th grade camp where I was the counselor, I had children from all different situations and my heart went out to them. I wanted to be the brightness in some of their days because for some of them, school is their escape.” Carolyn’s desire to make a positive difference in the lives of children was the deciding factor that pushed her into education as a career path.

Finally, Carolyn was asked about how the transition from nursing to education had been for her, and how it has matched or differed from her perceptions. Carolyn stated that she knew there would be a great deal of course work, and that it would be more focused on essays, analyzing theories, and learning how to teach, but that she felt ready for the change because the repetition of nursing was not for her. Carolyn ended the interview by discussing that although she always wanted to be a nurse growing up, her experiences as a young adult hold more value than her dreams when she was younger.

Participant #2: Leslie. When Leslie entered college, she chose chemistry as a major because she had been interested in the field since high school and saw potential career paths in pharmaceuticals or possibly education. When asked to explain what she meant by a possible education path, Leslie stated: “I mean that I knew I wanted to major in chemistry, but that I possibly wanted to be a high school chemistry teacher. I just wasn’t sure if that was the age group I wanted to work with.”

When asked why she changed majors, Leslie stated that the implementation of the new Inclusive Elementary Education major at the college intrigued her, and that she initially was going to pursue both the new education major and chemistry as a double major. Unfortunately she needed to work on her GPA in the chemistry program, and decided to instead focus on education, knowing that she could continue her work in chemistry in graduate school if she chose so. Leslie spoke about one disappointing aspect of the small college setup, stating: “When I changed majors, I learned about how the state university student-teacher program places students across the region, and I wanted to return home to New York City to student teach. I was disappointed that I would not be able to work in that environment while here.”

Leslie ended her conversation by stating that she has encountered a few difficulties as an education student, but that the department has been helpful to her, and accommodating to her unique circumstances. She ended by saying: “There are benefits to attending a small college. Since there is not a large portion of the student body in the education program, I have more access to meeting with my professors. I can have a relationship with them that goes beyond them just knowing my academic performance in their courses.”

Participant #3: Ryann. Ryann was notable in the study as someone who retained her original major, while also pursuing teacher licensure through the elementary education pathway. Ryann’s initial major coming into college was psychology, but during her freshman year, her focus shifted. Ryann stated: “I initially chose psychology as my major because I wanted to help people. I was also interested in the clinical aspect of psychology.” Expanding upon why she eventually shifted her focus to education, Ryann went on to say: “I added education to my academic plan after taking a required educational psychology course for my psychology degree. I realized I was more interested in education and child development than I was in the program I was currently in.”

Ryann’s shift in focus was unexpected to her and forced her to adapt her expectations of what college would be for her. She stated that she did not have any real expectations for the education

program, that she felt she could simply do what she had done throughout her years as a student, “study, do the homework, and pass the tests, somehow becoming an expert in the process.” She also stated that she has thrived as an education student and feels that it has come naturally for her because she is passionate about becoming a teacher and is motivated to learn as much as possible. She ended her interview by saying that “unlike many other majors, you can’t exactly fake it until you make it when becoming a teacher.”

Ryann was honest in her perceptions about her continuing as a psychology major, but deciding to become a teacher, in essence combining her learning in both areas to assist her in gaining expertise regarding child development.

Participant #4: Ari. Ari started college as a nursing major, but quickly changed her major to psychology after being disillusioned during her first semester. She stated that she chose nursing because she participated in a vocational nursing program while in high school and wanted to make a difference in people’s lives. Her first semester of college happened during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the difficulties she had in her courses led her to take another look at her future goals. Speaking on the subject, Ari said: “I changed my major because I started nursing school during the pandemic, and the coursework didn’t resonate with me. I changed my major to psychology because I knew I wanted to help people but felt sort of lost. Then I took an educational psychology course and loved the class. In education, you are helping many kids and making a difference, so that’s why I changed majors.”

Ari came into the education major feeling that she would struggle, due to the difficulties she faced during her first three semesters in college. She stated that learning how to lesson plan has been a primary difficulty point for her, trying to make sense of all the pieces that go into teaching, but that she is proud of the work she has done and feels motivated now knowing what she wants to do after college.

Participant #5: Mary. Mary entered college as a nursing major, stating: “I had always wanted to be a pediatric nurse because I loved kids and loved helping people. I went to a vocational high school and spent all four years in health, studying nursing. I completed my CNA my junior year of high school and knew that’s what I wanted to do.” Mary entered college with a singular focus on her nursing program, but her experiences, clouded by the COVID-19 pandemic, left her disillusioned. Mary’s experiences trended more in the direction of her having difficulties in her chosen major of nursing than anything else. In her interview, she stated: “before even going to clinicals I knew it was going to be a tough time. I could tell I wasn’t cared for as a person.” Mary also had a negative experience during her clinicals that was formative in her moving away from nursing. On this, she said: “The first day of clinical practice came and my patient died in front of me. I had to sit there with my patient’s wife and hold her hand as she sobbed ... I knew that if I stayed in nursing, I would spend the rest of my life regretting my decision.”

Mary had been mulling over the eventual change to elementary education as a major for over a semester before finally making the change. She stated that the appeal of nursing was that it was a stable income, and after coming from a family that struggled financially, she wanted to provide greater stability for her own future children. She ended her interview stating that the experiences she has had in the education program have been validating, if not perfect overall. And that she feels validated as a student and person by her professors, who feel more prepared to be teachers and mentors than what she had previously experienced.

Participant #6: Sam. Sam entered college as a nursing major, knowing from childhood that she either wanted to be a nurse or a teacher. When asked why she chose nursing over teaching, she stated: “I chose nursing because I perceived that they made more money, and I had seen all the attacks on teachers in the news. I was born sick, and a nurse saved my life. That really influenced me.” Sam stated that when she began nursing clinicals, the extreme anxiety she felt led her to understand that she made the wrong decision. Sam’s mom is a teacher, and subsequent discussions with her led her to believe that a switch was needed. She struggled because, at the time of her initial decision, the college had not yet implemented the new inclusive elementary education major, so she had considered transferring. When she received an email over the summer after her freshman year about the new major, she immediately made the switch.

Sam stated that she thought education would be easier than nursing, and that in one aspect, she was correct. Sam said: “there are no quizzes or weekly tests in education, it’s solely essays and lessons. Overall, the workload isn’t easier, it’s just different.” She finished her interview by saying that she feels validated in her change, because she feels that teaching is a more natural fit for her than nursing was, and that she needed those negative experiences to help guide her through.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis requires a number of decisions by the researcher. These include, according to Braun and Clark (2006):

- Prevalence: How often a given theme arises within the data.
- Inductive versus theoretical thematic analysis: Inductive meaning that the themes are linked directly to the data themselves, free of previous research or notions about the topic, while theoretical means that the analysis of data is tied to the topic itself, and the researcher’s interest in given topics and themes.
- Semantic or latent themes: “With a semantic approach, the themes are identified within the explicit or surface meanings of the data” (p. 84). With a latent approach, the researcher goes beyond what was said, identifying underlying assumptions and ideologies.

For this study, data is included in the thematic analysis if it is found to be prevalent in at least half of the responses given by participants in a given question, while utilizing an inductive analysis approach, focusing on the relevance of the data itself as opposed to contextualizing it within previous literature. Finally, a latent approach is utilized to interpret participant responses, and how those responses speak to the topic of this paper; why the participants decided to become teachers after starting their college careers in a different, science focused major.

Question #1: What was your major or anticipated major when you began college? The initial question in this study was given in order to contextualize the positioning of each participant. These answers were simply given without any further context, that comes in the second question. Therefore, no analysis of the first question is required. Four of the study participants began college as nursing majors, one as a chemistry major, and one as a psychology major.

Question #2: Why did you initially choose that as your major or want to major in that? One major theme arose in the participant responses to this question. Five of the six participants

responded that they chose their major out of a desire to help people, which dovetails into them remaining in a service-related field when switching to education. This theme not only provides context to the choice, but also the underlying reason, service to humanity and a desire to make a difference through the work the participants long to do. Younger et al. (2004) discuss reasons that student teachers chose to become teachers, finding that one of the primary reasons that was given was a desire to pass on their positive experiences with teachers with the next generation of students. Rutten and Bernard (2020) report similar findings. They write, “altruistic motivations were among the most common reasons the teacher candidates identified for wanting to teach. Three themes account for these motivations, including the single most prominent within our analysis: the desire to make a difference for individual children” (p. 18).

Four of the five participants who stated that they chose their major to help people elaborated on their answer by stating that they chose their major because of prior life experiences that led them in that direction, including experiences as a child that interested them in the major (three of the participants stated this), or experiences through vocational training in high school (three of the participants stated this). This finding aligns with a study completed by Watt and Richardson (2008), who find that experiences as a student was a statistically significant reason that pre-service teachers choose teaching as a profession.

What the themes in Question #2 detail is that the participants, as incoming college students, were driven primarily by a sense of obligation to humanity, with a desire to make a positive difference by helping others. This altruistic reasoning is consistent with my own experiences as a professor, advisor, and mentor to college students, many of who are driven by a sense of duty to make a difference with their profession. However, while not a significant theme, it should be noted that two of the study’s participants stated stability and good pay were factors in their initial choice of major. Both altruistic reasoning and stability are consistent with Alexander et al. (1994) and the eight themes of why people choose to become teachers, providing greater context to why the participants eventually changed majors to education.

Question 3: Why did you change your major to education? This question provided the true point of this study, while the other questions provided a greater sense of context around it, the real heart of this study sought to figure out what factors drive college students towards education as a major when it was not their original intent to do so. The data collected in Question #3 was nuanced and provided various themes. First of all, four of the study’s participants stated that their experiences in their initial major were problematic. This includes issues with professors, anxiety around nursing clinicals, a loss of interest in the content, and/or disillusionment with the initially chosen major and the subsequent profession. Three of the participants stated issues arising from and related to the COVID-19 pandemic, which essentially forced them to confront their own assumptions and make a more personal decision based around happiness and peace of mind. These findings are unique to this study in that they are difficult to find reflected in other published research on this subject.

Three of the study’s participants took an initial education course while still within their previous major in an exploratory fashion, or as an external degree requirement, and found that the content resonated so deeply with them that they ended up changing majors or adding licensure to their program of study.

Finally, four of the study’s participants had experiences, either prior to college, or while already enrolled, working with children which influenced their decision to become teachers. All of these themes

taken together provide meaning to this question; the participants of this study showed that personal experience is a driving factor behind decision making. This stands in contrast to the idea that parents, upbringing, and a desire to make money are the primary factors that influence what students choose to do with their futures. It is also consistent with Question #2, in that a desire to feel they are making a difference and have happiness in their life path are driving decisions in why the participants chose teaching as a major.

This question was at the core of this study, and participant responses were illuminating as to why they decided to become teachers, leaving behind their original college goals. Of particular note is the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic was a stated reason for changing majors. This phenomenon warrants greater study, but in the scope of this research, seeing it as a reason may speak to the participants focus on their own mental and emotional well-being.

Question #4: When you did change, did you have any preconceived expectations about what going into teacher preparation would involve regarding difficulty? Two primary themes arose from Question #4, the first was that four of the six participants stated that they did not have many expectations due to education not being their original plan when entering college, while the second was that three of the six participants had negative expectations due to the fact that they had become disillusioned with college after their failed original major. What the first theme illuminates is the fact that the study participants entered a state of disequilibrium, having to find new footing and reconceptualize what their college experience would be in changing their major and what their futures would look like. By having to step into a new pathway, there was uncertainty for the participants. Ari spoke on this in her interview when she said: “When I changed to education, I did not have any idea about what teacher preparation would be. I knew there would be lesson planning and field hours, and I knew the level of preparation would be a lot of work, but that the work was different than in nursing.” Ari’s words spoke to her entering an unknown, and not being sure how to quantify that.

Within the second theme that arose from Question #4, which was that participants had negative expectations due to disillusionment in college arising from their first major, Ryann spoke poignant and direct words: “I honestly was not expecting to thrive or feel like I belonged in the education program. Since it’s not what I originally looked into, I didn’t know what to expect. I naively thought that preparing to be a teacher would not have as many pieces as it does.” These words again spoke to the fact that there was an unknown in changing to a new major, but also a specific level of negativity due to her previous interactions at college.

These themes, similar to the themes found in Question #4, create opportunities for further research, as they are ill defined through outside research, and are largely unique to this study. It warrants exploring how replicable these results are outside of my institution.

Question #5: Do you feel that your experiences so far in the education program match your preconceived perceptions? I feel it’s important to note that this question was based in my own assumptions about how participants would answer the previous question. But since four of the six participants had little in the way of expectations when entering education as their new major, it greatly skewed the statistics on this answer. However, there was a depth in the interviews that gave greater context beyond Question #5 itself, where participants expanded upon their experiences so far in the program. I will attempt to draw that out in my thematic analysis of this question.

Farkas and Duffett (2010) wrote about the tensions and views of teacher educators. While these

professionals by and large share a dedication to social justice and preparing quality teachers, their study shows that many struggle taking a critical view of themselves and their own areas of growth. In answering Question #5, four of the six participants spoke to the nature of instruction and the professors in the education department as positive factors in their outlook forward in finishing their programs and becoming teachers. This does not absolve me from taking a critical and growth minded perspective of my own work, but the positive feedback does affirm some of the actions of the department I work in.

Discussion

This study addressed the question of what motivates students to become teachers into what motivates students to change majors after the fact, when they have already enrolled and begun their higher education studies. What the survey and subsequent interviews with the six participants found was that these students valued a career focusing on service and making a positive difference in the world. While this is a common reason that many young college students state as one of their goals in choosing a career, this is not simply a cliché, it is a statement that provides value for many students. For college recruiters, professors, advisors, and other support staff, this should be taken into account when advising students on what they should focus on as a college major.

This study detailed the path that the six participants took to become teachers. And although each of their stories differed, there were common threads among them. Once students are enrolled in college, feeling connected to their program of study, support and mentoring are needs that the study participants stated multiple times. Regardless of the size of the department or institution, students need strong mentoring and personalized, quality support. For teacher educators specifically, we do not meet the needs of a field in crisis of meeting teacher shortages by talking students into a career that might not be right for them, our focus should instead be on providing quality instruction, mentoring, and support.

This support cannot be transactional, students are deserving of preparation that is honest, rigorous, and embraces a focus on service, love, and respect. With this study in mind, the following list summarizes the major implications of this study:

- Teacher preparation programs must provide authentic experiences for their students. There is no substitute for building true rapport and validating a student reasoning for becoming a teacher.
- While validating student reasoning for becoming a teacher, teacher preparation programs must still maintain a high level of rigor, preparing students with a focus on the realities of working in the bureaucracy of public schools. By focusing only on the 'warm fuzzies' of teaching, significant progress towards creating teachers who work in the field longer will not be made.
- Teacher preparation programs must remain capable of embracing students who change majors a year or even two years into their college studies. This does require a certain amount of creative problem solving when creating a program of study that will assist a new teacher candidate in graduating with their degree and initial teaching licensure on time.
- Understanding what motivates college students to become teachers can assist teacher preparation programs in recruiting, drawing more students into programs initially. This is an especially important consideration for small programs who have limited resources and are spread thin trying to accommodate students who transfer into programs as sophomores or even juniors. By raising the percentage of students who declare education as their program

from the beginning, it will lessen the burden on small programs, providing more consistent program pacing and advising.

Next Steps

This research is the first step in a growing research agenda that I will be continuing to explore. It is my desire to continue looking into issues around why students not only choose to become teachers, but their growing teacher identity throughout their college studies, and even into their careers. What makes this agenda different from the literature that already exists is that my intent is not to only understand why students choose to teach, but to go deeper into the phenomenon this study explored; why students who choose teaching as a major after beginning college are not choosing teaching from the beginning, and what we can do as teacher educators to attract these students from the onset.

Teacher preparation is foundational to the American education system. Without higher education programs doing quality work, preparing students who truly want to teach, and are prepared rigorously to do so, the entire educational system remains at risk of failure. While it is our job as teacher educators to provide training and a quality education to anyone who chooses to teach, attracting quality students into our programs from the beginning is a part of the challenge we face. By delving into a research agenda that is foundationally relevant to my job, it is my belief that I will become a better educator, advisor, mentor, and recruiter.

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