To Invest, Coast or Idle: Second-stage Teachers Enact their Job Engagement

Cheryl L. Kirkpatrick

Project on the Next Generation of Teachers
Harvard Graduate School of Education

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Introduction

Job engagement, or an employee's interest in, enthusiasm for and investment in his or her job, is a work attitude that many employers and their employees in various fields hope to maintain and develop. Empirical studies of job engagement in various sectors show that it is associated with many positive behaviors and outcomes for both employees and the organizations where they work (Brown, 1996; Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006; Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002; Huselid & Day, 1991; Kahn, 1990; Kanungo, 1982; Knoop, 1980; Lawler & Hall, 1970; Lodhal & Kenjer, 1965; May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004). Research on job engagement in many fields has shown that it is related to employee retention (Brown, 1996; Huselid & Day, 1991), effort (Brown & Leigh, 1996), and productivity (Harter et al., 2002; May et al., 2004). To date, much of this work has been quantitative and little of it has focused on teachers.

This paper reports on a qualitative study examining the job engagement of twelve teachers in the second stage of teaching, or teachers with 4-10 years of teaching experience. Teachers in this stage of their career are an important yet infrequently studied subgroup of teachers. Researchers forecast an increase in numbers of second-stage teachers stemming from a national need to hire millions of new teachers in the early years of this decade (Johnson, 2004). Additionally, attrition rates for this sub-group of teachers continue to be high (Arnold, 1993; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). This may, in part, be due to their tendency during this period to re-evaluate their career choice (Huberman, 1993).

The second-stage teachers interviewed in this study describe themselves as being engaged in their jobs, but their engagement varies in terms of how they describe investing in their jobs. In contrast to their novice years, the confidence and competence they feel as second-stage teachers provide them with greater flexibility about how to allocate their time and energy and enable them

to adjust the amount of time and effort that they invest in their teaching. For some participants their experience in teaching allows them to invest more time and energy in their classroom practice. For others, it enables them to redistribute their time and energy between their classroom teaching and other demands. Still others recognize their ability to draw on their current knowledge and skills, investing little additional time and energy in their practice. The teachers in this study made decisions about how and whether to invest in their classroom teaching in contexts that were largely laissez-faire and provided little guidance for them. The choices these teachers made have important implications for their ongoing development and retention in teaching.

Literature Context

Improving the development and sustainability of teachers

Research has shown both that quality teaching is critical to student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Hanushek, 1992; W Sanders, 1998; W. Sanders & Rivers, 1996), and that teachers are leaving classrooms at high rates (Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005; Luekens, Lyter, Fox, & Chandler, 2004). Up to fifty percent of teachers leave the teaching profession within the first five years (Ingersoll, 2001), and attrition remains high for teachers in the first ten years of their career (Arnold, 1993). Such attrition, which has been shown to include the most able teachers (Feng, 2005; Kreig, 2006), is detrimental to both schools and students (Guin, 2004; Johnson, 2004; Nield, Useem, Travers, & Lesnick, 2003; Texas Center for Educational Research, 2000). This has prompted researchers and policy makers to investigate ways to encourage the continued development and improved retention of teachers (Guarino, Santibanez, Daley, & Brewer, 2004; Ingersoll, 2001; Johnson et al., 2005; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2003).

Currently, much of the research on teacher retention and development focuses on novice teachers – those with fewer than three years of experience (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Guarino et al., 2004; Johnson, 2004; Johnson et al., 2005). However, the challenges of retention and development persist for teachers who remain in the classroom beyond their novice years (Arnold, 1993; Kane, Rockoff, & Staiger, 2006), making it necessary to attend to their needs as well.

Second-stage teachers are unique in ways that may make them important potential contributors to schools and students, and worthy of focused attention. On average, teachers at this career stage feel confident in their teaching (Huberman, 1993) and tend to possess greater skills than novices (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004; Kane et al., 2006; Murnane & Phillips, 1981; Rockoff, 2003). Also, some second-stage teachers take on leadership roles (Berg et al., 2005; Donaldson et al., 2005; Johnson, 2004), thereby providing valuable services and increasing the instructional capacity of their schools.

Research also suggests that second-stage teachers may experience waning interest in and enthusiasm for teaching (Huberman, 1993), leading some to re-evaluate their career options. Ultimately, attrition remains high for teachers with fewer than 10 years of experience (Arnold, 1993; Bobbit & McMillen, 1994). Additionally, some research has shown that from at least the fifth year, and perhaps even earlier, teacher effectiveness reaches a plateau (Kane et al., 2006; Rockoff, 2003). This research is even more of a concern when one considers descriptions of teaching as an occupation that requires continual development (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Increasing demands on teachers stemming from the need to attend to diverse populations of learners, the introduction of new teaching technologies and the need to improve the performance of all students makes attention to teacher attrition and continued development beyond the novice years essential.

Complicating efforts to attend to teacher attrition and development is the persistently isolated nature of teaching, originally described by Lortie (1975). Increasingly, novice teachers participate in induction and mentoring experiences that provide them with guidance (Kardos & Johnson, 2007), and diminish their isolation in their first one or two years (Charner-Laird, Kirkpatrick, Szczesiul, Gordon, & Watson, 2007). However, many teachers who persist beyond the novice years may find that isolation returns with the end of their induction program. Informal reports suggest that their work is often characterized by limited interactions with other teachers, sparse feedback and little reward and recognition. The isolation and lack of guidance that many teachers experience in their second-stage and beyond makes it critical to better understand how teachers feel about and invest in their work.

Examining the job engagement of second-stage teachers

The concept of engagement is one that is familiar to many educators. Student engagement has been the focus of a great deal of study, with higher student engagement being linked to higher student achievement (Marks, 2000) and lower drop-out rates (Alexander, Entwistle, & Horsey, 1997). Though teacher job engagement is less frequently studied, the purposes for studying it are similar, since higher engagement among employees, has been shown in various sectors to be associated with greater employee effort (Brown & Leigh, 1996), motivation (Lazarus, 1991), productivity (Harter et al., 2002; May et al., 2004) and higher employee retention (Brown, 1996; Hakanen et al., 2006; Huselid & Day, 1991). Arguably, higher levels of teacher engagement might lead to higher levels of engagement by students.

For decades, organizational psychologists have studied job engagement and the similar concept of job involvement. Recently research on the topic has accelerated. Although the

definitions of these two concepts vary subtly, both job engagement and job involvement measure an employee's psychological attachment with his or her job (May, et all., 2004). The two terms are so similar that some researchers use them interchangeably (Brown, 1996). For the purpose of this study, I will use the term job engagement, though some of the literature on which I draw uses the term job involvement.

Although the definitions of job engagement vary from study to study (Brown, 1996), some common factors emerge. Most studies of job engagement examine an employee's interest in his work, his enthusiasm for his job and his investment in his job. Statements such as, "When I get up in the morning I feel like going to work," and "I am enthusiastic about my work"(Hakanen et al., 2006) are examples of Likert-scaled items that appear on measures of employee engagement. In the end, researchers use these measures to place employees' responses on a scale that ranges from high engagement to low engagement. They subsequently describe a highly engaged employee as one who tends to be highly motivated, committed to his job and believes that his job is meaningful and challenging (Brown, 1996). These are characteristics that all schools and administrators would hope their teachers exhibit.

Job engagement has been studied by in many different employee groups including soldiering (Britt, 2003), camp counselors (Kahn, 1990), insurance agents (May et al., 2004), and only occasionally teachers (Hakanen et al., 2006). Regardless of the field or context studied, the motivation for examining job engagement stems from researchers' belief that better understanding these concepts will benefit both employees and employers in many work contexts. Brown (1996) cited 87 studies that indicated a strong, positive relationship between engagement in one's job and job satisfaction. One recent study reports that teachers who are more engaged tend to be more committed to their schools (Hakanen et al., 2006). These findings suggest that

learning more about teacher engagement may help us understand how to better retain and develop teachers.

Research shows that job engagement is affected by both personal characteristics of the employee (e.g. self-esteem and self-efficacy) and workplace characteristics (e.g. clear expectations and the availability of support or guidance) (Brown, 1996; Kahn, 1990). A teacher might explain her diminished engagement as a result of personal factors such as changing professional interests, or a lack of self-efficacy in performing her work. Another teacher's diminished job engagement might be explained by a lack of opportunities in which to engage, or a lack of support offered by the workplace. Additionally, because personal characteristics and job characteristics are interpreted differently, what positively influences one teacher's job engagement might diminish another teacher's job engagement. For example, needing to take classes to become recertified may inspire one teacher's job engagement, while the same requirement may diminish another's.

This study adds to the literature on job engagement and second-stage teachers. I found that teachers who describe themselves as engaged in their teaching enact that engagement in very different ways. Variations in job engagement for this sample of teachers became apparent as they described their investment in teaching. This research also illuminates some of the unique opportunities and challenges that teachers in this career stage face and that may affect their engagement and investment in their job. Opportunities that arise because the second-stage teacher is increasingly able to determine how to allocate time and energy at work, may increase job engagement and investment, though as this study will show, this is not always the case. Finally, this study suggests that schools may need to be more active in how they support and guide second-stage teachers' engagement and investment.

The Study

Having draw on various definitions and measures of employee job engagement (Brown, 1996; Kahn, 1990; Kanungo, 1982; Lodhal & Kenjer, 1965; Saleh & Hosek, 1976), I define a teacher's job engagement as her interest in, enthusiasm for and investment in teaching. Unlike many prior studies that measure job engagement in an effort to associate engagement levels with important workplace outcomes such as effort and motivation (Brown & Leigh, 1996; Lazarus, 1991), I sought a more nuanced understanding of how second-stage teachers described their engagement. To achieve that understanding, I interviewed 12 second-stage teachers, six from each of two different high schools, asking questions about their interest, enthusiasm and investment in their work. My research was guided by the following research questions:

- How do second-stage teachers describe their engagement in their work?
- What do these teachers say has enhanced or diminished their engagement in their work?
    - How, if at all, do their personal lives, school contexts, students, instruction, colleagues and other factors enhance or diminish their engagement?
- Do these teachers suggest that their job engagement is related to their projected tenure in teaching? If not why not?

Participants were purposively selected to ensure variation in their content area, gender and years of experience (see Table 1). Locating second-stage teachers from one of the schools proved to be particularly challenging. Most teachers were novices or veterans, an indication that issues related to second-stage teachers will become more pressing for this school in the near future.

Table 1. Participant characteristics

School 1			School 2		
NAME	DEPT.	YRS EXP.	NAME	DEPT.	YRS EXP.
Gina	For Lang.	4	Lynn	English	6
Laura	Science	6	Matt	Math	4
Thomas	English	6	Nick	History	8
Ian	History	9	Siobhan	Health	4
Ellen	Art	6	Ava	Spec. Ed.	7
Mary	Math	9	Cecily	Math	5

I selected participants from two similar schools to limit the contextual variation in the study. Both schools are public, suburban high schools with about 1500 students. They are located in blue-collar working-class communities with a higher percentage of students classified as low-income than most neighboring communities. Each school has one principal who is supported by a group of deans. Additionally, each school is organized into academic departments led by department heads.

I interviewed each participant using a protocol of open-ended questions for 90 - 120 minutes. After transcribing the interviews, I investigated patterns in these teachers' engagement by writing summaries about each teacher's interest, enthusiasm and investment in teaching and then comparing these memos across participants. I then coded transcripts using both thematic codes drawn from the literature on teacher engagement as well as themes that emerged from the data. The use of these codes assisted in identifying variations in their investment.

In refining my analysis at different stages of the process, I brought my findings to a study group and members of the Project on the Next Generation of Teachers. These outside perspectives raised important questions and alternative explanations that helped me clarify and refine my analysis and statement of findings. The feedback I received served to check my

process at different stages of this analysis, and consequently improved the interpretive validity of this study.

Findings

Analysis revealed that participants' job engagement centered on the work they do with students in classrooms, or as more than one participant described it, "the teaching part of teaching" (Laura, Gina). Participants talked about their engagement in their work as essential to their professional motivation and their retention in the field.

Although they all reported feeling invested in their jobs, especially in their classroom teaching, they also discussed investing varying degrees of time and effort into their teaching. At this stage in their career, they had developed confidence and competence in their teaching, which enabled them to focus less on issues that consumed them as novices - classroom management and school policies - and to reinvest this time and energy in other things. While some participants discussed their excitement about now having more time to attend to and develop certain aspects of their teaching, others talked about family and demands for professional recertification taking their attention and time away from the classroom, and one participant indicated that he had actually diminished his effort and investment in teaching because he found himself uninspired and sufficiently competent.

Many participants commented about the general absence of guidance and support as they decided whether and how to invest in their teaching at this stage of their career. Acknowledging that their schools did not intervene when teachers stopped investing in their work, participants recognized that they, too, could continue to teach even if their effort was severely diminished.

Participants suggested that a better balance of guidance and autonomy in helping teachers make decisions about how to invest in their jobs would benefit them and their teaching.

The following discussion begins by examining how these second-stage teachers talk about their interest in, enthusiasm for and investment in "the teaching part of teaching," and how they see their engagement in teaching as critical to their retention. Next, I discuss how, despite this similarity, they describe varying degrees of investment in their classroom teaching. They have opportunities and alternatives that they did not have as novices. Participants discussed four distinct investment alternatives that I have called, "investing actively," "investing judiciously," "coasting" and "idling." Participants who discuss investing actively talk about being able to invest their time and energy into their classrooms and teaching in new and interesting ways. Those who invest judiciously felt the need and had the chance to be selective in their investment in teaching, often directing more of their time and energy into other responsibilities. Coasting was an alternative described by one participant, who thought he was competent enough as a second-stage teacher to rely on what he had done in the past and, thus, coast with very limited investment in his teaching. Participants also referenced some of their veteran colleagues who had stopped investing in their teaching altogether and were, thus, idling. After describing these investment alternatives, I discuss the role that schools play in guiding and supporting teachers' investment. I draw upon the experiences of these participants, all of whom make their decisions in schools that intervene little in individuals' choices, and are best described as laissez-faire. Finally, I suggest a more balanced approach to attending to the job engagement and investment of second-stage teachers.

"The teaching part of teaching" drives teachers' interest and enthusiasm

I recognized from the beginning that the job engagement of teachers might differ for different aspects of their work. Therefore, I asked participants to describe the parts of teaching that interested them the most, made them the most enthusiastic, and in which they were the most invested. They unanimously said that they were most engaged in working with their students and in efforts to help them learn and develop. More than one participant referred to this as "the teaching part of teaching" (Laura, Gina).

They offered different reasons why the "teaching part of teaching" was what maintained and drove this focus on classroom teaching. Some were motivated by a love of their subject. For example, Laura said, "I really like the subject material, for one thing. So I always find that I'm learning new things. . . the more I teach, the better I understand the material." Others found classroom teaching interesting because of their interactions with students. When asked what drives her interest and enthusiasm in teaching, Mary said, "Probably interacting with the kids. I have classes that have a couple of kids I wish I didn't have to interact with. But for the most part, you know, they make it fun. They make it interesting." Many respondents mentioned both sources of inspiration. Ava summed it up when she said, "I love working with them [the kids]. I love working with high school kids. . . . And I love the subject. I love English. I think there's so much you can do with it."

Most participants reported that their engagement in "the teaching part of teaching," was what sustained them. Matt said, "I can't see myself doing anything else because I think my enthusiasm, my interest, and my investment in teaching is I guess high enough. It almost keeps you there. I think teachers teach because they love it." There was a general sentiment that, if they ceased to be interested in and enthusiastic about what they did as teachers, they should stop teaching. Thomas said, "If I stopped loving my job as a teacher, I would stop teaching. I will

only do this as long as I love it and I hope I always love it." Keeping them in their jobs is their deep-seated interest in, enthusiasm for and a feeling of investment in what they do as classroom teachers. This may not be surprising, given that teaching has been described as a profession offering limited extrinsic rewards (Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986), but a fact that may elevate the importance of attending to job engagement among teachers.

Increased confidence in the second stage of teaching

These participants' engagement in their classroom teaching was in part bolstered by the fact that they had fewer concerns about their teaching at this stage of their career. A few teachers described actually being more excited about and interested in their teaching because they now felt like it was something they could do reasonably well. For example, Laura said, "I became a little more excited and a little more interested . . . simply because I really got the hang of it, for lack of a better word. . . I really started to kind of get a feel for what's going on." Research supports the possibility that higher self-efficacy may be related to higher work enjoyment and higher retention (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003).

These teachers' self-efficacy has grown with experience. Thomas described this simply. "I suppose incrementally it gets a little easier because I'm just. . I'm better at it. I'm more experienced." Similarly, Cecily said, "I feel confident in myself because I've been able to really learn from each year of teaching. And it makes me feel like I'm getting better from year to year."

Participants often contrasted their current sense of self-efficacy with how they felt during their first couple of years teaching, which were marked by struggles with very basic aspects of teaching. Lynn said, "That first year was just difficult." In addition to trying to create her lesson

plans for the first time, and figuring out how to "establish" herself in her classes, she was one of six participants who described having a split assignment, requiring her to travel from classroom to classroom in her first year. Lynn described her first and second years as a "huge learning curve," characterized by, "a lot of mistakes." Over time, however, she found teaching less difficult. In reflecting on her first year she said, "I've always been of the belief, do the hardest thing first and then the rest of it comes fairly easy." After a couple of years in the classroom she, "felt like I could say something without people looking at me like, 'What do you know?' You're the new teacher on the block. Got even better the next year. . . .I felt more confident about what I was doing."

The increased confidence and competence that so many participants described provided them with flexibility about how to spend their time and energy. Gina, a fourth year teacher, described being desperate for ideas in her first year, and "soak[ing] up any suggestions someone would give me." In contrast, when describing her current experience, she said, "I've been around long enough to know what works." Now, as a result of greater self-assurance with her teaching, Gina said she is able to, "filter. . .what I want to do and what I don't want to do." She is no less busy than she was as a novice – a point that many participants emphasize - but she has more control over how to use her time.

Similarly, Cecily explained, "You have more control because you know how things have gone in the past." She went on to say, "I really built up over the years a lot of different ways of explaining things. When the kids ask questions, I already almost know what they're going to ask because I've gone over the same stuff so many times." She was no longer constrained by very basic worries about whether or not her lessons would work. Over time she had become

sufficiently familiar with the curriculum that she could actually anticipate questions and draw on a repertoire of responses.

It is important to stress that these teachers were not saying that they experienced an abundance of free time in emerging from their novice years, or that their work got easier as second-stage teachers. Rather they recognized that because they had certain aspects of their teaching under control, they were able to make more choices about how to use the limited time they had. While some teachers described investing actively in their teaching by choosing to do things they thought would improve instruction, others chose to invest judiciously in their teaching while attending to other demands on their time. Finally participants recognized their ability to diminish their investment or altogether stop investing in teaching by relying on their experience. The following four sections will describe each of these investment alternatives in detail.

Investing actively

Some participants were excited to have the time as second-stage teachers to focus on developing aspects of their teaching that they considered more interesting than the basic tasks of lesson planning and classroom management, which held their attention as novices. Their ability to invest actively in their classroom teaching seemed to follow directly from the sense of self-efficacy they possessed as second-stage teachers. Putting more time and energy into developing their teaching was something they were able to do because they had already mastered the basics. They wanted to invest actively in their teaching because it made their work more enjoyable and because they thought it would make them better teachers.

Laura compared her first year of teaching with how she currently felt as a second-stage teacher:

> Getting those sort of nuts and bolts, maintenance issues under my belt. . . takes that off your mind and gives you more time to actually think about the material. Think about how it's going to be presented, and how you're going to explain to students, and what problems you might come up with that, which is to me the far more interesting part than, how long is a bathroom break going to be.

Laura was happy to be able to use her time and effort to invest in activities that she found "more interesting" professionally.

In many cases, teachers like Laura suggested that the ability to invest actively in their teaching seemed to inspire them further. Ellen, a 9th year art teacher talked about "changing her teaching" over the years:

> I love it. Yes. Because I am not real good with stagnation. I don't like to repeat the same things over and over and over. Even all my lessons, I try to find different ways to teach the same skills. Because I figure, if it's boring for me, it's got to be even more boring for them. So it helps. It keeps it fresh.

Likewise, Ava, a 6th year special education teacher, described her decision to participate as a co-teacher with a colleague in the English department, as an experience that she said, "has kept me more passionate about it [teaching English]."

Participants chose to commit this extra time to their teaching not only because it was interesting and inspiring for them but also because they hoped this investment would improve their practice. They believed that continuous learning and refinement of practice was necessary in order to teach well. Nick expressed this sentiment when he said, "I think you need to be constantly trying to retool, change. In other words, you're never perfect. I will never be a perfect teacher. There will always be things that I can improve, and if I'm not working to improve those things, then I'm bad." These comments echo the findings of many researchers of teacher education, that good teaching necessarily entails ongoing professional learning (Feiman-

Nemser, 2001). For his part, Nick chose to actively invest in his teaching by doing things like creating a new economics class, and teaching himself PowerPoint, which he used in many lectures. Notably, neither of these activities was necessary for him to continue to function satisfactorily as a teacher in the eyes of school administrators.

Matt also talked about wanting to improve his practice. He said, "I do choose to be invested because I want to be a better teacher every day. I want to be better next year than I was this year. I want to try to figure out how I can do that." Many participants in these two schools expressed independence and a sense of individual responsibility for remaining invested and engaged in their work. Typically, these teachers had to seek out their own opportunities for investing actively in their teaching. Administrators in their schools did little to encourage them or make opportunities available. Laura made this point describing a professional development workshop she recently attended:

> I think this school is pretty good about paying for professional development opportunities when we bring them to them. . . But I don't think that they do a lot to encourage us. . . I've never had my director or my principal come to me and say, hey, you should go to this.

Although many of these teachers sought out such opportunities in order to improve their teaching, the impact that these activities actually had on their teaching likely varied and is impossible to determine in this study.

Regardless of the impact, investing actively often occupied a great deal of time for participants. Lynn said, "I'll stay here until 4:00 or 5:00 working on things, researching things on the internet. Go home and I do the same thing." Siobhan rattled off a list of ways she actively invested in her work. She said, "I'm always working trying to make units better, trying to make the curriculum easier or harder. Trying to challenge kids who aren't being challenged. Reading up on information. Taking classes." Despite the long hours that these teachers still invested in

their work, having some choice about how to spend their time, made the long hours tolerable, and even enjoyable. Gina said, "So I feel like I bring a lot of work on myself, but by choice."

Sometimes, however, deciding to invest actively in their teaching led to frustration. Usually this was the result of administrators who did not recognize their efforts. Lynn described her disappointment in being passed over in a bid to be appointed advisor to a student group because of an earlier incident with her department head:

> There I was, working my butt off. Trying to be a teacher. I had a student teacher that year. And I'm doing my internship as well. And I'm here until late every day. I'm coming in early. And feeling like, that's all you're going to look at all year that I did. Well, screw you. That's really the way I felt. . . It affected my whole personality. My morale. Everything.

Lynn was not alone in complaining about the lack of recognition for her investment. Laura described being out late one night to support and assist her students at a science fair, only to be handed a letter of reprimand the next day when her mid-term grades were handed in 4 hours late. Experiences like these signaled to teachers that their administrators and department heads ignored the ways that they chose to continue investing in their teaching. They demoralized and diminished the engagement of teachers who otherwise were poised to invest actively.

Investing judiciously in teaching

Some second-stage teachers focused on striking a better balance between the demands of teaching and other demands and opportunities in their lives. As second-stage teachers, they could choose to attend to things outside of teaching that called for time and effort. They were still very much engaged in their jobs, but believed that now they could manage teaching well without the same level of active involvement, and thus they could rely on their current skill and repertoires to manage their lessons successfully. In contrast to the boundless time and energy they had to put

into teaching as novices, they could now invest judiciously in teaching. Though they sometimes felt guilty about not doing as much as they should or could, being able to be selective about the ways they utilized their time seemed to address important needs for these teachers. Such options might, in fact, sustain them professionally.

For example, Ava, the mother of a toddler, was expecting her second child at the time of our interview. She talked about the guilt she felt in not spending more time on her teaching and how she justified her decision.

> Part of me feels guilty that I can't give 100% to teaching. But you know what, sometimes on my worst day I'm better than a lot of people on their best day. So, I know I'm not hurting these kids. And I think, right now, I know enough to say, I know myself. And if I wasn't with it, and I think if I wasn't reaching these kids, or if they weren't as successful as I thought they should be, it would be time for me to step away. And I know that about myself. But right now, it's still successful.

Ava feels guilty that she cannot invest as much time and energy into her teaching, but believes that she can teach well with very little additional investment.

Four out of the twelve participants in this study had become parents during their second-stage of teaching, and two others anticipated that they would have children before they completed ten years in the classroom, which may explain why investing judiciously emerged as a prominent theme among these second-stage teachers. Mary emphasized that, though she might temporarily diminish her investment in teaching, she was still very interested in and enthusiastic about the work, and she anticipated eventually returning to a more active level of investment. When speaking about the year that she gave birth to her second child Mary said, "Last year… I had less time to spend, but I really liked all my classes. So the investment was down, but the high interest and enthusiasm would have been up." Later Mary contrasted her earlier and current investment in teaching, saying, "I took part in more of the professional development stuff before

I had kids. Because it gave me the new ideas to use . . . I haven't been doing anything extra going out of my way recently to do anything because of the time." She recognized the value of such extra efforts, but for a time would rely on the knowledge and skill she had accumulated, investing more time and energy in her family responsibilities.

While some participants redirected their time to their family, others committed it to the demands of recertification. These teachers were required by state law to obtain a master's degree by the end of their fifth year in the classroom, and to renew their certification every five years after by accumulating professional development points. These demands, ironically, actually seemed to draw participants away from investing actively in their teaching. Both Cecily and Matt talked about balancing the demands of recertification in their second-stage of teaching. Cecily, who chose to earn her master's degree in guidance, started taking classes during her second year of teaching because she would need to complete the credential by the end of year five in order to achieve professional certification. She described the impact that pursuing this certification had on her teaching:

> I mean, I guess, when doing my master's part-time, I was more distant from the kids because I was so focused on all this other stuff I had to do. I've let like personal things that have been going on in my life sometimes distance me from them a little bit.

Cecily's need to obtain her master's degree had, at least temporarily, shifted her attention and energy away from her classroom. Interestingly, she admitted that her experience doing her practicum for this degree had, in many ways, solidified her resolve to be a teacher. However, in the short-term it has also led to her diminished investment in her teaching.

Matt had just started his master's degree program. He recognized that pursuing this degree made him compromise his investment in his teaching. He explained,

> I'm in the process of getting my master's. So it's hard for me to be able to balance teaching, taking class, coaching, all these aspects of life as a teacher. But I have been offered an opportunity to be a mentor. I actually turned it down, temporarily. When that came up, when that opportunity came up, I basically said, "Well once I get my master's, I'd love to." But right now, I think I'm going to forego that opportunity. Give me a chance to focus and concentrate on what I'm doing.

Because Matt did not have to mentor either to fulfill his formal job responsibilities or to ensure that his classes functioned well, he decided to decline the role, at least for the time being.

These teachers could manage their careers along with other family or professional demands. For some, their ability to invest judiciously made it possible to continue teaching. Ava explained:

> Right now I'm feeling a lot better about it than I did a couple of years ago. You know, a couple of years ago, I'm like - should I just stay home? Is it worth it? I can't be my best here [at school] and be my best there [at home]. But at this moment, you know, I'm feeling better about this. There's more I want to do, there's more I know I can do with these kids. And that's where I am right now.

Ava felt that the time she needed to attend to her family would prevent her from being her best, both in her work and in her role as mother. However, after returning to work following her child's birth she realized that she could manage both. Feeling she could succeed as a teacher without always having to be at her "best," Ava chose to remain in teaching. Without the option to invest judiciously, she might have left teaching.

The second-stage teachers, who described making such compromises, viewed them as temporary. All of these teachers talked about a time in the future when their active investment in teaching would again return. They believed that being a good teacher meant continuously striving to improve their practice in one way or another. For example, Mary said, "What I'm hoping is, you know, as [my children] get bigger, I'll have more time to invest and get back into

the whole, you know, looking up the interesting activities and getting back to the creative part of it."

Coasting

Only one participant said that his investment in teaching had diminished over the years, and might remain diminished for the long-term. Ian, a ninth year teacher, described himself as being very interested and enthusiastic about teaching, but he admitted that currently he was not investing actively in his work. Nor was he investing judiciously as a result of other demands on his time. Instead, he was coasting. His self-efficacy enabled him to rely on the lessons and skills he had developed previously. He explained that he no longer was investing actively in his teaching because he felt no inspiration or support from his school and administrators.

Ian operated very independently as a second-stage teacher, making most of his own decisions about his curriculum, pedagogy and continued professional investment. He saw both benefits and costs to this independence and autonomy:

> I pretty much have complete autonomy with what I do in the classroom. So, I have a lot of freedom. There's no one looking. . breathing down your neck. Or there's no one even walking through the classroom. Again, that's great in a way. . you don't have to worry about it. But, again it can be a slippery slope also. You can get too much. . .too, too, too loosey y'know about it, and then not serve the kids as well.

Ian both enjoyed his autonomy and saw it as his license to coast. In the past, he had created his own AP course and annually supported his students through a History Day competition, things that no other history teachers in his school were doing at the time. However, after nine years he felt this had become "too much." He was not encouraged or rewarded for putting anything extra into his teaching and, thus, it had become easier for him not to invest and consequently "not serve the kids as well."

Though Ian admitted that he might not be teaching as well as he could, he was sufficiently competent to be ignored by administrators. He said, “the principal knows me and he knows that I’m not going to cause any big waves and I can handle the class.” In fact, Ian’s descriptions of his teaching indicated that exciting things were still happening in his classroom because he had developed skills and a repertoire of lessons over the years. He understood that, in his words, “If the kids are not really responding to me then I don’t want to be [teaching].” Thus, his investment in teaching was limited to maintaining this competence.

Unlike other participants who said their level of engagement and investment in teaching was something for which they were individually responsible, Ian laid some of the responsibility for his coasting on his school environment. He reflected, “I have so much autonomy that I can kind of get bored.” Later he said, “Mediocrity is sort of the norm. And it does diminish your appreciation for the job I think. So, I mean. . and it’s horrible, but you become more like your environment than you care to admit.”

Ian hoped that either his school culture would eventually improve, or that he would find another school that would recognize his experience and appreciate his efforts. However, in the meantime, he felt could continue to coast. Though he was uninspired and dissatisfied in his current school, the idea of giving up the security of seniority unnerved him, and he admitted his reluctance to switch schools or leave teaching. He said, “. . .you kind of have that mentality I think in teaching that you are protected by your professional status, or you’re protected by working ten months a year. There are those benefits that keep you in the classroom and not taking the risk to go [elsewhere].”

The possibility of idling

Though Ian stood alone in this sample in admitting coasting rather than investing in teaching, many other participants described colleagues who had diminished their investment even further. In their opinion, these colleagues had completely stopped caring about and investing in their teaching. They were idling. They stayed in teaching, but made little effort to actually teach. Participants felt such idling harmed students and diminished their own motivation. They hoped to avoid idling in their working futures.

For example, Lynn observed, "[My colleagues] become cynical, and they become bored with what they're doing. And it's the basic, you know, hand-out-the-packet-and-do-the-book-yourself type of thing." Nick also suggested that quite a few of his colleagues were idling. He said,

> There are a lot of teachers that are at that point where they just grab the same worksheets that they brought out for the past ten years, and share the same videos that are 20 years old, and do the same lame activities, read the same passages from text, answer the same questions. That's not teaching.

Idling upset Nick. He believed that, if these people could not find a way to rediscover some sort of enthusiasm and interest in their work, then they should leave teaching. Like most of the other participants who referred to their colleagues' idling, Nick blamed these individuals rather than the school culture for their idling.

These second-stage teachers recognized that idling was an option for many teachers. Some of them also indicated that the schools' tolerance for very low levels of investment diminished their own motivation. Laura described teachers, ". . .who come in late, and don't do their job. Maybe they're teaching, maybe they're not teaching. We have a teacher who basically walks the hallways during all of his classes. And that stuff is very unmotivating." Those who described such teachers said that, if they ever approached teaching in that way, they hoped they'd have the sense to leave the profession.

Laura also argued that school officials bore some of the responsibility for keeping her invested. She said, “You look at them [idling teachers] and you’re like, if you aren’t getting fired, and you’re not showing up on time, why would I do anything? Why would I go above and beyond?” Thomas told of realizing that a custodian who used to ridicule him for staying at school so late each night, was right when he suggested that the administrators didn’t care how late he stayed. Thomas said, “He was right. . . I thought he was cynical and just didn’t know what he was talking about. . . It doesn’t matter. . . I’m not treated any differently as a result of it [my efforts].” Later in the interview, Thomas said that he was planning to reduce his investment, possibly becoming like the teachers he criticized: “In September, for the first time, I’m going to teach and go home. . . and come back and teach and go home.”

Discussion

The role of schools in shaping second-stage teacher investment

The participants in this study were drawn from two different schools, both purposively selected for their demographic and structural similarities. However, one common characteristic of these two schools surfaced again and again in the interviews: both were laissez-faire organizations. Second-stage teachers’ experiences in these schools indicated that they had a great deal of decision-making authority and independence both in deciding how to teach and how to invest in their teaching. Although the schools often financially supported participants’ decisions to improve their teaching, more often than not, the teachers themselves had to discover those opportunities and activities with little if any guidance from administrators or department heads.

Many participants enjoyed the autonomy that their school contexts provided them. It made them feel even more competent than they otherwise might, at this stage in their career. One participant said, “I think what I like about the ability to be autonomous, it means that the people

that are supervising me, feel that I'm competent and they're allowing me to do my work. . .And I think it shows a level of respect."

Over and over participants indicated that they assessed their practice reasonably independently. Most second-stage teachers received no more than the required evaluations of their practice from administrators. Lynn explained, "They [administrators] do come and observe. They have to. But once you get tenure, they observe every other year. So this year's not my year for it. So he'll be observing me next year." Aside from these infrequent reviews, most second-stage teachers received most of their feedback from their students or occasionally from colleagues whose responses they had to solicit. In the absence of institutional guidelines or collegial norms, these teachers' judgments about work were left largely up to them.

The autonomy that these teachers experienced ironically might limit their development as second-stage teachers. Given their feelings of competence at this stage in their career, many of them believed they did not *have to* invest in their practice. One participant put it this way: "I could be probably more enthusiastic with change in my repertoire. I guess I hesitate based on, I know what I do works, and that kind of thing." Additionally, when second-stage teachers chose to invest in their teaching, they did so in ways that were not necessarily informed by careful analysis of their practice and how they could improve it. Many wanted to teach better. However, their autonomy did nothing to help them realize what they had to learn or what they might stand to gain from different types of investment.

In the absence of guidance, many teachers continued to invest in their work; committing extra hours, tracking down new resources and learning new skills. However, some were frustrated when investments in their teaching went unrecognized. This frustration seemed to have a negative effect on the career plans of these teachers. Both Laura and Lynn complained

that their administrators had ignored their tremendous investment in their classes and their students. In settings, where these teachers decided on their own about whether or when to invest in their teaching, being reprimanded despite their great efforts felt like betrayal. Both of these teachers had once been open to the possibility of teaching for the rest of their career. At the time of the study, however, both said that they would only stay in teaching for the next year or two because they were so frustrated with their administrators.

Perhaps the negative impact of these laissez-faire school cultures and administrators is most obvious in the words of Ian and others who mentioned how their schools permitted teachers to coast and idle. This not only might limit the effectiveness of those who failed to invest, but also seems to dampen the morale of their colleagues. Ian described the utter lack of attention and guidance he and others experienced: "I'm amazed at . . . how groups of people that are here for kids. . . can basically fall back on their laurels if it benefits them. . . how principles can kind of be softened if the environment doesn't challenge them." And, Ian would probably agree that he wouldn't be coasting today if he had appropriate support and guidance in his work. He said, "I do need to be monitored though in some ways. . . Or I have to feel like I'm part of the team to really thrive. If I'm let be myself then maybe I'll get too lazy, or fall back on some bad habits. . . So, you need. . you need that push."

Conclusions and Implications

Promoting the continued development and retention of second-stage teachers will require additional attention not only to teachers' job engagement, but also to the ways in which this engagement is encouraged and rewarded by administrators and colleagues. This exploratory study suggests the job engagement and investment of teachers may increase in the second stage

of their career as a result of their increased ability to determine how to use their time. This ability to make choices about their investment in teaching opens the way for various investment alternatives. What this study also points out, however, is that increasing the investment of second-stage teachers may not always have positive effects on retention and development, especially when their investment is ignored. Schools and administrators must guide and support second-stage teachers while allowing them to maintain some of the autonomy they feel they have earned and need at this stage in their career. In considering how this might occur, implications for school leaders and second-stage teachers emerge.

Implications for school leaders

Schools need to provide second-stage teachers with more support and guidance. With more of our nation's teachers entering their second-stage, schools need to attend to the needs of more than just novice teachers. School leaders need to create and embrace policies that reflect what research has suggested: that effective teaching requires continual growth and development throughout the career (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Teachers in this study suggested that opportunities to continue developing their practice have the potential to both improve their practice and keep them inspired.

However, if this cultural shift is to be realized, schools need to invest in ways to evaluate and educate their second-stage teachers. This study shows that these teachers often assume that what they do works. In many cases, it likely does. The question that all school professionals – teachers and administrators - should be raising together is, "How can we make it work better?" Answering this question requires attending to individual teachers, their practice and their philosophies. It requires determining what they do extremely well and strategizing about how they can share these skills with others. It also requires determining how they could improve, and

not leaving them alone to find an opportunity or activity that will help them focus on those areas of improvement.

Additionally, guiding and supporting second-stage teachers needs to happen in ways that respect the expertise that many of these teachers have already developed. Guiding teacher investment at this stage may be accomplished by mandate, but it is likely that morale will suffer in the process. Guiding teacher investment means getting them involved in the process of assessing and analyzing their own practice. It also means recognizing the other demands that they face at this stage of their life and career, and collaboratively finding ways that continued development can occur without placing undue stress or unacceptable personal demands on them.

Implications for second-stage teachers

Teachers, too have a role in embracing strategies to improve their engagement and investment in teaching. They have to be willing to open their classrooms up to colleagues and administrators to allow examination of their practice. It cannot be good enough that their classes function, that their students score well, or that students and colleagues speak positively about them. Teachers need to be able to review their successes and failures. They need to be willing to share details about their successes and struggles by allowing others to examine their practice. Though their classrooms may function smoothly, they need to believe that new ideas and strategies could result in even better student achievement. Analyzing and refining their practice with other educators may provide the “push” that Ian sought. It could help second-stage teachers move beyond simply feeling competent, to understanding what their competencies and their shortcomings are. It could inspire and motivate them to invest in ways that will benefit students and themselves.

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