

Winona State University

OpenRiver

Education Doctorate Faculty Works

Education Doctorate

3-2018

Addressing Teacher Retention with the Wisdom of Those Who Have Stayed

DeJuanna M. Parker
Winona State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://openriver.winona.edu/educationeddfacultyworks>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Parker, DeJuanna M., "Addressing Teacher Retention with the Wisdom of Those Who Have Stayed" (2018). *Education Doctorate Faculty Works*. 10.
<https://openriver.winona.edu/educationeddfacultyworks/10>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Education Doctorate at OpenRiver. It has been accepted for inclusion in Education Doctorate Faculty Works by an authorized administrator of OpenRiver. For more information, please contact klarson@winona.edu.

Addressing Teacher Retention with the Wisdom of Those Who Have Stayed

DeJuanna Parker, Ph.D.

Winona State University

Of the myriad factors that affect positive student outcomes, teacher attrition poses the greatest threat. The threat increases in hard-to-staff, and rural schools. Even though educational administrators and other school leaders are sorely aware of this problem, the fractured initiatives and programs they have implemented to solve the problem have not returned lasting results. We know this because teacher shortages still exist. We know this because we can go to the website of almost any school and see the list of teacher vacancies. We know this because we have heard of or have witnessed teachers leaving their classes (and the profession) before the end of the school year, and sometimes before the end of the school day. This is cause for great concern, but not hopelessness.

Many school divisions have implemented programs and initiatives to reduce attrition and increase retention; and their efforts have been noble. However, one important part of the solution (because the solution is multi-faceted), is hidden in plain sight. My great grandmother used to tell me, “Baby, if you want to learn how to make a pie, you need to go to somebody who already knows how to make a pie.” If we want to figure out how to keep teachers in schools for a long time, we need to go to teachers who have been in the schools for a long time. Veteran teachers hold a vital key to unlocking the “teacher retention code”.

What Teachers Want

Community

Schools are often a central component of a community; therefore, especially in rural areas, teachers become prominent citizens because of their connection to the school. School-community relationships are often representative of community culture. This is especially true in rural areas which are now more geographically and socioeconomically diverse than in the past.

One core issue that has emerged from recent studies is how people become involved in and integrated into a community, which is termed “binding to the community” (Jacques, 2014). The key concepts of binding to community consist of the following:

- prospecting to seek out a place to call home
- outreaching to make purposeful contact with community members and organizations
- being guided to learn from and interact with community members and organizations to gain knowledge of community norms, traditions, and values
- being accepted into the community through being valued and finding common threads; and finally,
- exercising community connections to perpetuate norms, rituals, and practices through continued interaction with the other community members.

One researcher notes that for people who are new to the community, efforts to develop and cultivate relationships are best approached through the workplace. Consequent efforts to integrate include neighboring activities directly related to community cohesion, such as attending local events, and joining organizations (Jacques, 2014). Becoming a member of the community can be a protracted process for newcomers, as the binding process may vary from one individual to another. What we do know is that it is harder for a teacher to leave a school when he or she has developed strong community ties. One account from a veteran teacher from a Northern Virginia suburb illustrates this concept:

When we were searching for a home and talking to people about where to live, we actually went to the police station in town and the Chief gave us some of his time to talk

about the community. We had a daughter in elementary and one in high school, and the principals of the schools gave us their time. I can't think of anything else that would draw us to the community more than this display of rural community culture.

Respect and Recognition

When asked about community attitudes towards veteran teachers, participants in a recent study responded that they were well regarded in the community, and were respected professionally and personally (Parker, 2016). Another respondent explained that behavior towards teachers by the community is not limited to simple respect within the school setting, but respect was evidenced through widespread recognition in the community. A veteran Art teacher remarked, "When out and about in public, my husband says I should run for public office since I am met and greeted by students and parents wherever I go."

Much of the recognition and respect derives from veteran teachers' community embeddedness. Some are lifelong community members, but many others are transplants from other areas who have made the school district locale their home. As such, these educational professionals are able to leverage social standing in the community with respect in the school setting, and vice versa. One English teacher shared, "Having borne and raised my children here, in the public school system, in school and community sports programs and in church, after 39 years here, it is "home."". Another teacher intimated,

When I first arrived, I bought a small farm, and raised horses and crops. This gave me something in common to talk about with the natives and mitigated the idea I was just another Yankee schoolteacher.

Many veteran teachers frequent businesses owned by parents of their students, or places where their students work. These seasoned professionals sponsor community sports teams, attend local celebrations, and support local charity events. In all, the teachers who feel that they are connected to the community, and are respected in the community, tend to persist in the profession (Parker, 2016).

What Teachers Have

Intrinsic Motivation

In the emotional context of teaching, pupils' progress and positive teacher-student relationships provide the main source of job satisfaction, especially for teachers in the later phases of professional life. Many teachers indicate professional and personal interactions with students help to renew commitment to the profession.

A relationship exists between internal motivations and rewards, and veteran teacher persistence. Commitment to the teaching profession is revealed through dedication to student success, willingness to take measures to ensure success occurs, and fulfillment experienced as a result. Veteran teachers often speak of actions undertaken to ensure student success, including staying late hours after school for supplemental instruction, and taking on mentor roles for students. One male History teacher related,

Watching them get it... Watching students grow or have original ideas. When they actually get excited about doing something well. Laughing together. Having dedicated colleagues. Getting feedback from adult students after years have passed. These are the fruits of my labor.

Another veteran teacher shared,

I write numerous letters of recommendation for students and being asked to do this is time-consuming but gratifying. I have had students come back years later and tell me that my class was one of their favorites or that they are going into teaching because of my influence. Helping a student be the first to graduate from high school and college in his family. That, to me, is what keeps me coming back.

Though the needs of veteran teachers are not always met, rewards are found in watching children learn, creating learning cultures in the classroom, and promoting learning in the community. Intrinsic motivators had most influence on veteran teachers' intentions to stay in the profession. This may sound idyllic, but research and evidence in practice support that while extrinsic factors such as salary, professional development opportunities, tuition reimbursement, and relocation assistance influence teachers to remain in the profession, most teachers who become veteran teachers look inward to persist in the profession.

The Teaching Gene

A veteran teacher shared,

After doing this for 40 years, I may retire, but I will never be able to stop teaching. I am currently applying for a position at the local community college and will still give lectures to various groups. I was at some function not too long ago, and someone I was talking to said, 'I know you're a teacher because you have been lecturing me for the past 10 minutes.' I thought that was spot-on. I mean, come on, I'm a teacher through and through. I don't care what the situation is, I will find a way to teach.

In many instances, the attachment to teaching is related to a deeply rooted, "calling" to teach based on values and beliefs. One study found that teachers' personal values based on a sense of obligation to make a difference in the community influenced their career choice to become and remain teachers (Beasley, 2013). One 20-year English teacher noted,

I didn't necessarily have the best experiences in high school. My dad became an alcoholic (non-abusive, just absent), my mom a recluse, I wasn't in the 'popular' crowd nor was I a top student. I think part of my calling came from the fact that I understand this pain in others. My dad became sober and by the time I got to college, I was an 'A' student. I had always been a reader, so being an English teacher was a win-win. I have an empathy and a natural love of learning that I felt obliged to pass on. Is this a calling? I think so. I never felt that I had to do something else, just teaching.

A veteran Art teacher intimated,

Of course, teaching is a calling. There are people who are knowledgeable in a subject, but do not have the rapport to actually be a teacher. Finding a way to reach a hundred different students each day requires a special ability. I feel that teaching is a gift and thus a passion. Not everyone can teach. Those who can, teach.

Teaching is all-consuming. Ask any teacher who takes stacks of papers home to grade, or the ones who sponsor clubs, and go to every sporting event to support students. Some estimated that the call to teach comes from understanding the pain of others. With this, there is a need for inner strength to accomplish the goal of having a long and successful career.

What School Leaders Can Do

With so many novice teachers leaving the profession, it is imperative for educational policy makers, district school boards, and building administrators to understand how to retain veteran

teachers. Research supports that experienced teachers are essential to education because of the impact they exert on student development and success. One of the first steps to retaining these valuable professionals is for district and building administrators to understand and leverage factors influencing the persistence of veteran teachers, especially in rural and other hard-to-staff areas where need is high. Knowledge of persistence factors such as community connections, respect, intrinsic rewards, and deep attachment may help decision makers to develop initiatives specifically targeted to retention of this population of educational professionals. What is clear is that veteran teachers can be a catalyst for retention. If we were to ask **why** veteran teacher stay in the profession, there would be hundreds of different responses, but when we ask **how** they find the wherewithal to stay, there are themes that emerge, such as connectedness, respect, recognition, passion, intrinsic rewards, and the calling to the profession. When school leaders recognize these factors in novice teachers, and leverage the wisdom of veteran teachers, retention will improve.

Bibliography

- Battitori, J. R. (2009). *Motivational factors in veteran New Jersey teacher job satisfaction and retention*. Retrieved from ProQuest. (UMI 3416592)
- Beasley, T. A. (2013). *Influences contributing to the longevity of experienced teachers in the elementary, middle, and high school settings*, (Doctoral dissertation, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA). Retrieved from digilib.gmu.edu
- Clotfelter, C. T., Ladd, H. F., & Vigdor, J. L. (2010). Teacher credentials and student achievement in high school: A cross-subject analysis with student fixed effects. *Journal of Human Resources*, 45(3), 655-681.
- Crosswell, L. (2006). Understanding teacher commitment in times of change.
- Day, C. E. (2005). Reform, standards, and teacher identity: Challenges of sustaining commitment. *Journal of Teaching and Teacher Education*, 21, 563-577.
- Day, C., & Gu, Q. (2009). Veteran teachers: Commitment, resilience and quality retention. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 15(4), 441-457. Retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ866433>
- Fowler, R. (2012). Rural characteristics and values: A primer for rural teachers from non-rural backgrounds. *National Teacher Education Journal*, 5(4), 75-80. Retrieved from <http://web.ebscohost.com>
- Glazer, J. (2013, July 11). Classroom contemplations: Overlooking the value of veteran teachers. *State Impact*. Retrieved from <http://stateimpact.npr.org/florida/2013/07/11/classroom-contemplations-overlooking-the-value-of-veteran-teachers/>
- Grissom, J. A., Nicholson-Crotty, S., & Harrington, J. R. (2011). *Estimating the effects of no child left behind on teachers and their work environments*. Retrieved from <https://my.vanderbilt.edu/jasongrissom/files/2012/05/grissom-nicholson-crotty-harrington-nclb-effects-on-teacher-attitudes.pdf>
- Huysman, J. T. (2007). *Rural teacher satisfaction: An analysis of beliefs and attitudes of rural teacher job satisfaction*. (Unpublished dissertation, University of Central Florida, Orlando). Retrieved from http://etd.fcla.edu/CF/CFE0001656/Huysman_John_T_200705_EdD.pdf
- Ingersoll, R. (2004). The teacher shortage: A case of wrong diagnosis and wrong prescription. *NASSP Bulletin*, pp. 16-31.
- Jaques, D. R. (2014). *Binding community: A grounded theory*(Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest (UMI No. 3715944).
- Keigher, A. (2010). *Teacher attrition and mobility: Results from the 2008-09 teacher follow survey*. Washington, DC: U. S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics.
- Ladd, H. F. (2013, November). Why experienced teachers are important and what can be done to develop them. Scholastic Strategy Network
- McCoy, L. P. (2006). Southern rural public schools: A study of teacher perspectives. *The Qualitative Report*, 11(4), 749-763. Retrieved from <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1657&context=tqr>

- Meister, D. (2010). Experienced secondary teachers' perceptions of engagement and effectiveness: A guide to professional development. *The Qualitative Report*, 15(4), 880-898. Retrieved from <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol15/iss4/7>
- Mirza, H. (2011). You can always make a difference (slideshare). Retrieved from www.slideshare.net/hanadym/positive-teacher-attitudes-positive-class-environment/related=1
- Parker, D. M. (2016). *Sustaining teaching careers: Perceptions of veteran teachers in a rural mid-atlantic school division* (Order No. 10107972). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1793406833). Retrieved from <http://137.198.76.25/docview/1793406833?accountid=11272>
- Taylor, C., McNaney-Funk, C., Jardine, D., Lehman, G., & Fok-Chan, E., (2014). Teacher rewards: Going beyond the stickers, moving beyond extrinsic motivation (Unpublished report).

Bio

Dr. DeJuanna Parker is a 25-year veteran of k-12 education. She currently serves as an adjunct professor at Winona State University. She is a frequent conference presenter, workshop facilitator, and more recently, a strategic planning consultant. Dr. Parker can be contacted at dejuanna.parker@gmail.com