

Practitioner to professor:

Second career academics' perceptions of entry into the academy

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Abstract

Academic institutions that prepare personnel to work in the field of special education face considerable challenges in finding and retaining qualified faculty. At the same time, a growing number of special education teachers and administrators choose academia as a second career. Few studies have sought to capture their lived experiences as shift to the world of academe and being a professor. This paper presents findings from a qualitative study in which interviews were used to elicit practiced special education professionals' understandings of their early experiences as special education faculty. The data suggest that interviewees perceived that their practice knowledge and skills made them credible teachers and enhanced their ability to create bridges between theory and practice for their students. While study participants understood themselves as being experienced at and willing to work collegially with others, they found the academy to be significantly less conducive to collaboration than their previous work environments. Implications for doctoral training programs and special education departments are discussed.

Background and Rationale

The persistent shortage of qualified special education personnel who can effectively meet the needs of every student with a disability is inextricably linked to the well-documented and ongoing concerns about the supply of special education faculty not meeting annual demands (Pion, Smith, & Tyler, 2003; Smith, Pion, Tyler, & Gilmore, 2003; Smith & Salzberg, 1994; Tyler, Smith, & Pion, 2003). Further, Austin (2002) called attention to the fact that: “the retirement of significant numbers of senior faculty is occurring at a time when societal expectations of academic institutions are expanding” (p. 94). The author posited that the individuals who fill these faculty positions would need to have a different skill set. In the case of academic institutions that prepare teachers, the need for incoming faculty to have a different set of skills is due, at least in part, to ever-increasing pressures from shifting federal school reform and accountability policies. These pressures include calls for education faculty to bridge the research to practice gap and solve the challenges faced by today’s schools (The National Research Council [NRC], 2005).

Concomitantly, accreditation standards for teacher education programs require that academic institutions hire education faculty who have “exceptional expertise, have contemporary professional experiences in school settings at the levels that they supervise, and are meaningfully engaged in related scholarship” (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education [NCATE], 2006, p. 33). Given all of these factors, academic institutions that prepare personnel to work in the field of special education face considerable challenges in finding and retaining qualified faculty who have the necessary practice experience to effectively provide education and training to pre-service students and professional development to practicing professionals.

The good news is that a growing number of experienced professionals are choosing academia as a second career (Fogg, 2002; Thomassen & Gustafson, 1997). These practitioners turned professors or “second-career academics” bring necessary and valuable practice experiences to their teaching and research. Nevertheless, they often have limited knowledge about the culture and language of the academy and may not fully understand the professional responsibilities of a university professor (Fogg, 2002). As these pre-tenure, second-career academics navigate unique university contexts and learn about idiosyncratic department or program emphases and priorities, they must also attend to the triad of research, teaching, and service that comprise the primary responsibilities of an academic (Tierney, 1997; Trowler & Knight, 2000). Any one of these scholarly tasks may dominate a professor’s life, depending on their university setting and culture, career stage, disciplinary training, and abilities. Further, personal values, preferences, and professional experiences affect the ways someone approaches and prioritizes their academic responsibilities. Similar to other pre-tenure faculty, second-career academics can find their new professional roles and responsibilities overwhelming (LaRocco & Bruns, 2006).

Findings from research that has examined pre-tenure faculty or “early career” faculty experiences and satisfaction with work suggest they routinely experience high levels of job related stress that is fueled by the pace and intensity of the work (Olsen, 1993; Reynolds, 1992; Rice, Sorcinelli, & Autsin, 2000; Rosser, 2005; Tierney, 1997). Early career faculty report that they face significant challenges with balancing their academic responsibilities and their home lives (LaRocco & Bruns, 2006; Rice et al., 2000; Tierney, 1997). The research has also shown that although early career faculty express the desire to collaborate with colleagues within and

across departments, they often find isolation and limited opportunities for intellectually stimulating interactions with senior faculty (Olsen, 1993; Reynolds, 1992; Rice et al., 2000).

Concerning support for early career faculty, researchers have suggested that universities provide faculty development and mentoring programs and activities that facilitate collegial interactions (Boice, 2000; Sands, Parson, & Duane, 1991; Sorcinelli, 1994; Tierney, 1997). The literature has also highlighted the need to nurture pre-tenure faculty by offering them university-specific resources and helping them locate more universal resources, including external grants and funding that might be used to support travel or graduate assistants (Boice, 2000; Center for Personnel Preparation in Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education, n.d.).

While there is a body of research that has examined early career faculty socialization and entry into the academy, few authors have specifically written about the experiences of practiced professionals who chose a second career in higher education (Fogg, 2002; Thomasen & Guftafson, 1997). Similarly, conspicuously few studies describe the experiences of practiced educators who obtain their doctoral degree and make the transition to the academy (DeSimone, 2001; LaRocco & Bruns, 2006), with little written about how early career special education faculty, who are practiced special education professionals, understand their early experiences with and transition to their university communities.

The purpose of this paper is to present the results of a qualitative study that explored why experienced special education professionals chose to move from being a practitioner to being a professor and how these pre-tenure, special education faculty (hereafter referred to as pre-tenure, second-career academics) understood their early experiences in the academy. Specifically, select findings derived from one-on-one interviews with eight special education professionals who were in the early years of their second careers as special education faculty will be presented.

The Context of the Investigation

The researchers conceived the idea of investigating the experiences of veteran special education professionals who had chosen a second career in higher education during a collegial dinner at a conference in 2003. As we discussed our recent transition to the university from our former professional careers (special education administrator/teacher and early childhood special education teacher/consultant), we were both surprised and comforted by our mutual and similar concerns about our capacity to make the transition to the responsibilities of our respective faculty positions. Between us, we had professional experience totaling over 30 years. We had marked success in our former careers and left because we believed that preparing future education professionals was a way to make an even greater contribution to the field. Yet, the challenges we were facing in managing the day-to-day work of being pre-tenure, second-career academics were overwhelming.

Our mutual discomfort led us to conduct an initial investigation (LaRocco & Bruns, 2006) about pre-tenure, second-career education faculty. We interviewed 11 early career faculty who had recently transitioned to the academy after working, on average, 12 years in education and related fields. What we discovered, on the one hand, was similar to findings from previous research (e.g., Ambrose, Huston, & Norman, 2005; Olsen, 1993; Tierney, 1997). Participants in our initial study struggled with managing the day-to-day responsibilities of their positions. On the other hand, unlike the participants in some earlier studies (Olsen, 1993; Sorincelli, 1994), the majority of early career faculty in our initial investigation reported that they had some type of supportive relationships that helped with their adjustment to their university community. This finding and the fact that little has been written about how pre-tenure, special education faculty

with professional practice experience understand their early experiences in the academy led us to conduct the present investigation.

As such, this study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are experienced special education professionals' reports of why they chose to move from being a practitioner to being a professor?
2. What are pre-tenure, second-career academics' perceptions of how prepared they were to assume their new professional roles as researcher, teacher, and institutional citizen?
3. What are pre-tenure, second-career academics' perceptions of how past professional experiences made a difference in assuming and adjusting to their new professional roles as researcher, teacher, and institutional citizen?
4. What are pre-tenure, second-career academics' perceptions of how their experiences with the organizational culture of the university community is the same or different from those in their previous careers?

Method

A qualitative individual interview strategy was selected to answer the research questions to explore the phenomenon of how experienced educational professionals in the early years of their second career as academics “come to understand, account for, take action, and otherwise manage their day-to-day situations” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 7). A semi-structured interview guide was developed and used to elicit pre-tenure, second-career academics' perceptions of their work and the events they had experienced or observed as they related to teaching, research, and academic citizenship, and their graduate training (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The interviews were semi-structured because each interviewee was asked the same set of open-

ended questions with follow-up probes used to expand upon participant responses (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Procedures

The population for this study was pre-tenure, second-career academics defined as full-time, tenure-track early career faculty at four-year colleges or universities who were practicing special education professionals for a minimum of three years before their academic appointment. To be included in the study, participants needed to possess a terminal degree of Doctor of Education or Doctor of Philosophy and have held their academic positions for more than one year and less than six years. Each researcher used network-sampling strategies (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006) to recruit study participants who met these criteria. Information about the study was disseminated via professional listservs (e.g., DEC Personnel Preparation e-mail list) and through word of mouth.

Individuals meeting the above criteria were electronically sent the interview protocol, consent letter, and demographic form for review. Upon receipt of an electronic confirmation of intent to participate, interviews were scheduled and conducted either face-to-face and or by telephone due to distance. Interviews lasted 45 - 70 minutes and the interview guide was followed in the same manner by each researcher with each interviewee. Researchers used a conversational approach when interacting with participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Member checking (Guba & Lincoln, 1989), a form of summarizing and confirming the participants' responses to ensure accuracy and to obtain a more complete understanding of participant meaning, was also used. This process gave participants an opportunity to validate the interview

data and allowed the researchers to complete a preliminary analysis while the interviews were in progress.

Data Analysis

Verbatim interview transcripts served as the data set for analysis. The first step in the analysis involved physically organizing and dividing transcripts into meaningful segments (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Initially, each transcript was read and reread several times to generate categories, themes, and patterns (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). With each reading, categories, themes, and patterns were refined and corresponding coding was modified as necessary. Data displays were created from the coded materials and similar responses were grouped according to the questions and the literature. Finally, occurrences of major themes were counted (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Sample Description

Eight pre-tenure, special education faculty with professional practice experience (second-career academics) participated in this study. They were all women and were between 32 - 58 years of age ($M = 49.7$ years). Participants indicated that they had received their terminal degree between 1999 and 2004; all were granted from research universities (RU/H, RU/VH). Six interviewees had completed their doctoral program with a Ph.D. and two had an Ed.D. Major areas of study included special education ($n = 4$), early childhood special education ($n = 3$), and early childhood education ($n = 1$). Time spent in their previous careers ranged from 8 - 20 years ($M = 12.8$ years). Collectively, their reported career experiences included being early

interventionists (birth to three), special education teachers (e.g., early childhood, high school), special education administrators, and professional developers.

Five of the interviewees were employed by research universities (i.e., Carnegie Classification - RU/H, RU/VH) and three were employed by teaching universities (i.e., Carnegie Classification - Master's, Baccalaureate). The universities were located in the Northeast, South, and Midwest; six were public and two were private. All participants had employment in a department or college of education that prepared special education teachers and were all engaged in special education teacher preparation.

At the time of the interviews, all of the interviewees were pre-tenure and each had been in academia for less than five years, with a range of two to five years in any faculty position. Four of them had previously held a position at another university (individual's cumulative experience did not exceed five years). Seven of the participants reported having had adjunct teaching experience.

Seven of the interviewees indicated that their academic year was 9 months in length and their academic year was the traditional two-semester structure. Participants reported teaching 4 to 12 three-credit courses each academic year. Four of the interviewees reported that they taught graduate and undergraduate students; three indicated that they taught only undergraduate students, and one taught only graduate students. Class size ranged from 12 to 45 students. Sample demographics are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic Profile of Participants

Demographic variable	Participant response
Gender	8 female, 0 male
Age	32 – 58 years, $M = 49.7$ years
Professional experience	8 – 20 years, $M = 12.8$ years
Terminal degree	6 Ph.D., 2 Ed.D.
Major area of study	Early childhood education = 1 Early childhood special education = 3 Special education = 4
Time in present position	2 – 5 years
Teaching load	4 – 12 three credit courses per academic year, $M = 6.38$ 12 – 45 students per course, $M = 20.55$
Students	Undergraduate and graduate level = 4 Only undergraduate level = 3 Only graduate level = 1

Results

The interviewee quotes below are representative of participants' responses. Pseudonyms are used to identify all interviewees and personal information that might suggest who they are or where they are employed has been deleted from quotations to protect participant confidentiality. Table 2 contains a list of interviewees and information about their previous professional backgrounds.

Table 2

Participants' Years in the Field and Professional Backgrounds

Pseudonym	Years	Professional Background
Eva	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early interventionist • Early childhood special education teacher
Gwen	16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director of special education • Special education teacher
Hanna	20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional developer
Julie	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early interventionist
Karen	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special education administrator • Special education teacher
Liz	13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early childhood special education teacher
Sherri	18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social worker • Early childhood special education teacher
Terry	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special education teacher

Choosing the Academy as a Second Career

When interviewees were asked to talk about why they decided to move from professional special education practice to a second career as a professor in higher education, seven of them reported making the change because they believed they could make a “bigger difference” in the academy than they could as special education teachers or administrators. They described wanting

to effect change by better preparing future special education practitioners and, in their words: “impact the lives of children and their families . . . by training teachers”. Five of the participants talked about making the switch to higher education because they felt “a disconnect” between what they believed was recommended practice and what they were experiencing in their special education practice. The following comments are representative of interviewees’ sentiments. In reflecting on why she moved to the academy, Liz, who had 13 years experience as an early childhood special education teacher, stated:

My experiences . . . were kind of in opposition to what I had learned, in terms of best practice and what I considered optimal programming and services for young children and their families. . . There was [a] kind of status quo in the school systems and agencies that I was involved with. I felt I could make the most difference by preparing future teachers on best practice, also incorporating and thinking about ways to be agents of change.

Similarly, Gwen, a 16-year veteran who had served as a director of special education and an early childhood special education teacher, described her reason for making the career switch this way.

Being in the field didn’t seem to be an effective way to reach teachers because there was so many other expectations on me as a special education director other than reaching out and doing the professional development piece that I really wanted to do. So, I thought, well maybe getting to the teachers before they get into the field and influencing their beliefs and values; that’s really what I think I want to do more than anything.

Feeling Prepared for the Academic Roles of Researcher, Teacher, and Institutional Citizen

Study participants were asked to reflect on their professorial experiences thus far and how prepared they felt to take on the roles of teacher, researcher, and institutional citizen. Five of the interviewees reported that they felt ready and able to take on all the various aspects of teaching in higher education. Julie described her preparation for teaching in higher education.

I feel very prepared . . . it was kind of a neat process. I had to teach every course in Early Childhood and a couple in just general Special Ed, [including] an Intro to Special Ed course, and another one on collaborating with families. And the way that worked is that all the doctoral students had to sit in while our major professor taught the courses, or other professors taught the courses. Then we took the lead and then we did it by ourselves.

Four of the interviewees perceived that they were equipped to tackle most aspects of research. Karen was a 9-year veteran with experience as a special education administrator and teacher. Her comments and concerns are illustrative of interviewees who felt relatively able to meet the demands of conducting their own research.

I have found that creating research projects is extraordinarily challenging. . . . making sure that I'm in line with what I believe is the right way to approach a research question and then just down to the nitty-gritty details about designing a study and sampling and all the things that go along with making a study happen. I was prepared only because I worked on projects my whole time by choice. They were not required of me. So, in a way, I do feel well prepared in the area of research.

Concerning being an institutional citizen and those professional responsibilities, none of the interviewees described feeling prepared. Julie reported:

I don't know that I had any specific preparation in serving on committees and that sort of thing. I think if my professors did that when I was in the doctoral program, I think I was kind of unaware of all that; and so, that was new for me.

Likewise, Eva, who had 10 years experience as an early interventionist and early childhood special educator, stated:

My advisor was fabulous in preparing me for academia from a research perspective, a teaching perspective, but kind of negotiating and navigating the larger system. . . I don't know if it was presumed or what, but, that didn't happen.

All of the interviewees reported some level of job related stress emanating from trying to manage their time and balance the triad of academic responsibilities. Gwen described the pace and trying to balance teaching, research, and service as: "Doing literally 13-hour days . . . Every night being up 'til after midnight. . . it's really pretty impossible". Participants all described being extraordinarily busy in their previous professional work. Nevertheless, these experiences in the field did not appear to buffer the affects of the pace and intensity of faculty work, except perhaps in relationship to their expressed self awareness that, at least in part, issues of balance were related to their expressed desire to get the day-to-day work done and make progress toward tenure and promotion. Interviewees were almost matter of fact in describing the inherent job-related stress. Karen stated: "You have to be a self-starter, you have to be motivated, you have to know how to keep yourself on track". Hanna, a professional developer with 20 years experience in an educational non-profit, reflected on that struggle.

I taught four classes the first semester. And then, the second semester, taught two classes and had to write a Federal Grant proposal, which you know how consuming that is. So, it was very difficult. I did presentations at professional conferences and things like that. But, again I had writing, I had publications already in the works. But, I felt, the teaching certainly everything was leaned toward my teaching responsibilities.

Finally, as they described their feelings of preparation to assume their professorial responsibilities, all of the study participants described feeling well prepared to work with and collaborate with others. Specifically, they recounted how collaboration with colleagues and families was something that was heavily emphasized in their academic preparation and in their previous careers. This finding will be discussed further in a later section.

Bringing Practice Knowledge and Skills to the Academy

In reflecting on how their previous careers helped them with adjusting to and carrying out their new roles and responsibilities, all of these interviewees reported that past professional work experiences helped them to be effective teachers. They believed that the practice knowledge and skills they brought with them informed what and how they taught. Karen stated: "I'm more effective having so much work experience behind me because I've been in schools, I worked closely with kids and with teachers . . . I think it brings a totally different perspective".

Participants perceived that their professional experiences made their teaching more credible and authentic. Gwen provided this reflection about how her experiences supported her credibility. She said: "Students value [my experience] immensely, I think it gives me amazing credibility with

them; they really seem to want to hear about the knowledge that I've gained from the classroom from the field without reservation, without questioning".

Finally, interviewees also described their previous professional experiences as enhancing their ability to create bridges between theory and practice for their students. Sherri, a former social worker and early childhood special education teacher with 18 years in the field recounted:

When I talk about things in classes I have personal experiences . . . it gives me credibility with students. I think it has helped me do research that is applied and I can see ways that research could relate to theory and the field.

Similarly, Julie stated:

I'm the only person who actually worked in Early Intervention. . . . what my students would say is that when I tell them stories and use those experiences to apply what I'm trying to teach them, and to demonstrate, hey this works. You know, it's in the research, the research says this works, here's been my experience. I would probably have a lot of students who would say that's very helpful in showing them how to apply information.

Experiencing the Cultural Differences between the Work Contexts

In reflecting how the culture of their university community was the same of different from the previous work environments, six of the eight interviewees found the academy to be significantly less conducive to teaming and collaboration. These participants were particularly puzzled by the difference between the two work contexts. Eva reflected:

I think what's very interesting . . . the lack of teaming that goes on, I mean it is very interesting because you would expect [collaboration] in our field. I just kind of found that

to be odd because I do think coming from special ed[ucation] you expect people [will] team, and it just hasn't carried over I guess.

Further and as noted above, all of these veteran special education professionals described themselves as “collaborators” who were experienced at and willing to work collegially to identify “what the issues are . . . solve them . . . and seek resources together”. They perceived the need to “learn from one another”. They understood themselves as being well equipped to work collegially and collaborate with others; yet, they were struggling with the lack of opportunities that presented themselves in the context of the academy. Karen reflected as follows:

I'm used to having to collaborate with people; I'm used to working with people. In Higher Ed, it seems people are much more, at least here at this institution, more focused on their project, what they're doing, and not a lot on collaboration. So, that was a big difference for me. I just remember my first summer sitting here going oh, my God, does anybody even talk to each other?

Interestingly, all of these interviewees indicated that they had access to at least one colleague who provided them with emotional support. Participants recounted being hopeful, at first, that they would be able to share their practice expertise and work with colleagues to conduct research and effect change in teacher preparation and the field of special education. What they experienced for the most part, however, was not what they had hoped. They expressed having a felt sense of isolation. Eva compared her practice experiences with her university life:

It is just the isolation as a whole culture. . . .I always had both collegial and administrative support easily accessible on multiple levels. . . . While I find the Chair to

be the most supportive here, it's hard to access . . . some sort of support to team and collaborate and to think about research questions and those kinds of things.

Terry, who had 8 years experience as a special education, expressed similar concerns and feelings. She said:

One major thing is feeling no collaboration on projects. . . . you have no one to bounce ideas off of. I mean, there's no one . . . it's not like you can walk down the hall and say, look I'm thinking about studying this issue, what do you think about this or would you like to study this issue with me.

Preparing Future Special Education Faculty

Upon closing the interviews, the researcher asked each of the participants to share a “take home message” for special education doctoral programs as a way of helping us learn from their experiences and providing some suggestions for how we might better prepare future special education faculty. Each of the interviewees provided several suggestions. Their collective recommendations are summarized below and will be expanded in the section on implications.

1. Begin early and have students explore various career possibilities, knowing that not every doctoral recipient will pursue a career at a research university.
2. Support doctoral students in identifying what they value as professionals and in pursuing their passion, in their teaching, research, and service.
3. Encourage doctoral students to spend time shadowing and talking with faculty about all faculty roles.
4. Bring in early career faculty to share their understanding of their experiences.
5. Devise a practicum in which doctoral students assume all faculty roles.

6. Provide authentic teaching, research, and service experiences.

Discussion

The aim of this investigation was to explore why experienced special education professionals chose to move from being practitioners to being professors and how they understood their early experiences as pre-tenure, special education faculty. Without a doubt, study participants arrived at the academy eager to effect changes by preparing special education personnel to effectively meet the needs of students with disabilities. They believed their practice knowledge and skills made them credible, effective special education faculty and informed their ability to assist students with bridging theory and practice.

To varying degrees, the pre-tenure, second-career academics in this study reported feeling prepared to undertake their roles as researcher and teacher. The study participants were generally positive about their preparation but emphasized that traditional training alone did not fully prepare them for the realities of a career in the academy. Of note is the fact they all voiced concerns about undertaking the role of institutional citizen, as their doctoral training had not emphasized learning about, for example, university infrastructure. This finding helps to strengthen Gaff's (2002) contention of a disconnection between graduate preparation and faculty experiences; he posited that there was a "three-way mismatch between student goals, training and actual careers" (pp. 8-9).

Austin (2002) stated that is job of graduate education to socialize students for academic and professional careers. This author further suggested that doctoral programs should not only focus on developing student competencies related to being a researcher, teacher, and engaged scholar but also on competencies related to being an institutional citizen. Likewise, Gaff (2002)

detailed the need for doctoral student training to extend beyond teaching and research to “participation in campus governance” (p. 9). The collective voices of the pre-tenure, second-career academics in this present investigation support this sentiment.

Overall, the pre-tenure, second-career academics in this study unequivocally understood themselves as being experienced at and willing to work collegially with others. Collaboration was how they were schooled; they had previously experienced and valued collaborative work and they were schooling their students to be collaborators. They recounted being hopeful, at first, that they would be able to share their practice expertise and work with colleagues to conduct research. Unfortunately, however, they found that the notion of “collaborative community” had not yet made its way to their programs and departments. Moreover, their experiences confirm what that has been described elsewhere (e.g., Colbeck, 2000; Graff, 2002).

Finally, the early career faculty in the present investigation expressed feelings of imbalance in terms of their academic and personal lives. Their sentiments were reminiscent of ones expressed by a new professor in a study conducted by Tierney (1997); he was quoted as saying: “I work seven days a week . . . and I mean seven days a week” (p. 8). In describing experiences that confirm findings from other research examining pre-tenure faculty socialization and entry into higher education (e.g., Olsen, 1993; Reynolds, 1992), the participants in this study tell us that little has changed in well over ten years. Their reports also suggest that we not only need to identify better ways to prepare, socialize, and support early career faculty in the technical aspects of their positions but we also need to get better at the human side of the enterprise.

Limitations of the Study

The small number of second-career academics participating in this exploratory research and the collection of data through a single interview are major limitations of this study. As such, the experiences of this group should not be generalized beyond the presented data. Additionally, most participants were prepared in research-intensive universities and their experiences cannot be extended to individuals with similar special education backgrounds (e.g., ECSE teacher, administrator) attending other types of universities (e.g., teacher training focus).

It is also important to point out that the authors brought their experiences to the study (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Both were experienced special education professionals but completed different doctoral preparation programs. Participants were divided between the authors based on geographic proximity, not similar doctoral experiences. It is unclear if this affected participant responses.

Implications

In describing the importance of hearing pre-tenure faculty voices and creating learning organizations in higher education, Tierney (1997) posited: “individuals change when they enter in a new workplace, but . . . an equally dramatic change also needs to be considered by the current participants in the organization” (pp. 15 - 16). The findings from this investigation suggest that special education senior faculty, department heads, and those of us who prepare future faculty, would do well to consider Tierney’s advice. If we expect to make any significant progress in solving special education faculty shortages, we must begin to identify ways to better prepare future faculty and to shift the culture of our programs and departments in support of early career faculty.

Doctoral Preparation

The goal of doctoral training is to develop students into stewards of the discipline with responsibility to the field and to the enterprise of education (Golde, Walker, & Associates, 2006). Doctoral degree conferring universities should review their programs of study and consider the suggestions offered by the pre-tenure, second-career academics in this study. As the participants in this present investigation suggested, it would be helpful if doctoral programs guided students through practicum experiences that encompassed all aspects of being a university professor. Such a practicum should include authentic teaching, research, and service experiences.

Students should also be expected to spend time shadowing senior faculty and talking with them about faculty roles and the culture of the academy. Senior special education faculty have a significant role to play. As stewards of the discipline, they must assume responsibility for sharing their disciplinary memories, understandings, beliefs, formal knowledge, and practical experiences. Senior faculty should serve as mentors for students throughout their doctoral training.

Knowing that not every doctoral recipient will pursue a career at a research university, doctoral programs should explicitly assist students with exploring the wide range of career possibilities (Austin, 2002; Gaff & Pruitt-Logan, 1998). As the study participants suggested, this should include activities that help individuals identify what they value as professionals and ways to pursue their professional passion. Programs should delineate the various career paths a doctorate offers including positions as consultants, program administrators in the public or private sector, and faculty at teaching or research universities, to name a just few. In this way,

doctoral students can begin to identify careers that best fit their experience, training, values, and passion.

Special Education Departments and Programs

Friend (2000) noted that: “the promise of collaboration has apparently permeated every dimension of society. . . . Even a cursory look at current trends and issues in education and special education illustrates that these disciplines also embrace collaboration” (p. 130). While our discourse and writings suggest that we embrace collaborative work, it appears, at least in the case of the eight programs or departments in which the study participants were employed, the espoused theory of collaborative work did not match the theory-in-use (Argyris & Schön, 1996). Trowler and Knight (2000) have cautioned that what institutions of higher education do concerning the induction of pre-tenure faculty is far less significant than the discourses and practices of the teams and departments pre-tenure faculty are trying to join (p. 28).

If we expect to recruit and retain the skilled practitioners that accreditation standards for teacher education programs require, senior faculty would do well to reflect on their practices to see how well they match their discourse. We need to find ways to actively collaborate with and nurture experienced practitioners who choose to make the academy a second career if we are to make use of their practice knowledge and skills in the preparation of pre-service special education students.

As discussed and described elsewhere, “one size does not fit all” (O’Meara & Rice, 2005). Consideration should be given to rethinking promotion and tenure and redesigning early career faculty workloads, roles, and responsibilities to align more closely with the missions of their respective universities. O’Meara and Rice (2005) presented several ideas on how we might

shift the culture of our programs and departments to be more collaborative in practice. The authors suggested that universities explicitly encourage the creation of partnerships between senior and pre-tenure faculty. For example, “ faculty fresh out of research universities could merge their expertise in methods with senior faculty’s knowledge of classrooms, teaching methods, and content” (p. 273) with a goal of conducting research related to the scholarship of teaching. Finally, mentoring should also be viewed as a critical and ongoing part of pre-tenure faculty development (Reynolds, 1992; Tierney, 1997). The short and long-term benefit of this type of assistance may be a deeper understanding of university roles and responsibilities; this in turn may lead to a better integration of work and personal lives from the start of doctoral training and through their early years as university faculty.

Future Research

This study is an initial attempt at describing second career special education faculty’s transition into the roles and responsibilities of higher education. Future research should focus on expanding the sample of pre-tenure, second-career academics and conducting longer-term studies. For the former, it is critical to interview a larger number of individuals to confirm or disconfirm the present findings and to build a more comprehensive knowledge base of this population. For the latter, a series of in-depth interviews, beginning with the participants’ second year in academia and yearly until promotion, would provide a greater depth of understanding of second-career academics’ experiences including what they bring to the academy, and how university administrators (e.g., Department Chairs, Deans) might best use these knowledge and skills within their organizations. Longitudinal studies would also provide valuable

documentation of participants' experiences and recommendations for changes to doctoral preparation as well as a record of "do's" and "don'ts" during the promotion process.

Concluding Remarks

The results of this study highlight the multi-faceted needs of pre-tenure, second-career academics in their transition to university faculty positions. The career shift from special education teacher or administrator to faculty member encompasses many skill sets, only some of which may reflect prior experiences. It is our collective responsibility to help these individuals develop needed skills and to nurture second-career academics' success.

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