



Towards an Understanding of Teachers' Retirement Identity Transition in Saskatchewan

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The Questions

1. What are the significant factors or influences on teachers' identity as they transition to retirement?
2. In what ways does a teacher's pre-retirement identity influence his or her successful transition to retirement?

The Background

- Today, the boundary between work and retirement is increasingly blurry.
- Retirement is perceived as both a decision and a career stage.
- Individuals experience the transition to retirement differently.
- Retirement decisions and transition are influenced by a variety of internal and external influences.
- The development of a retirement identity usually involves "an in-between period with fuzzy identities" (Wang, Hall, & Peters, 2014).

The Process

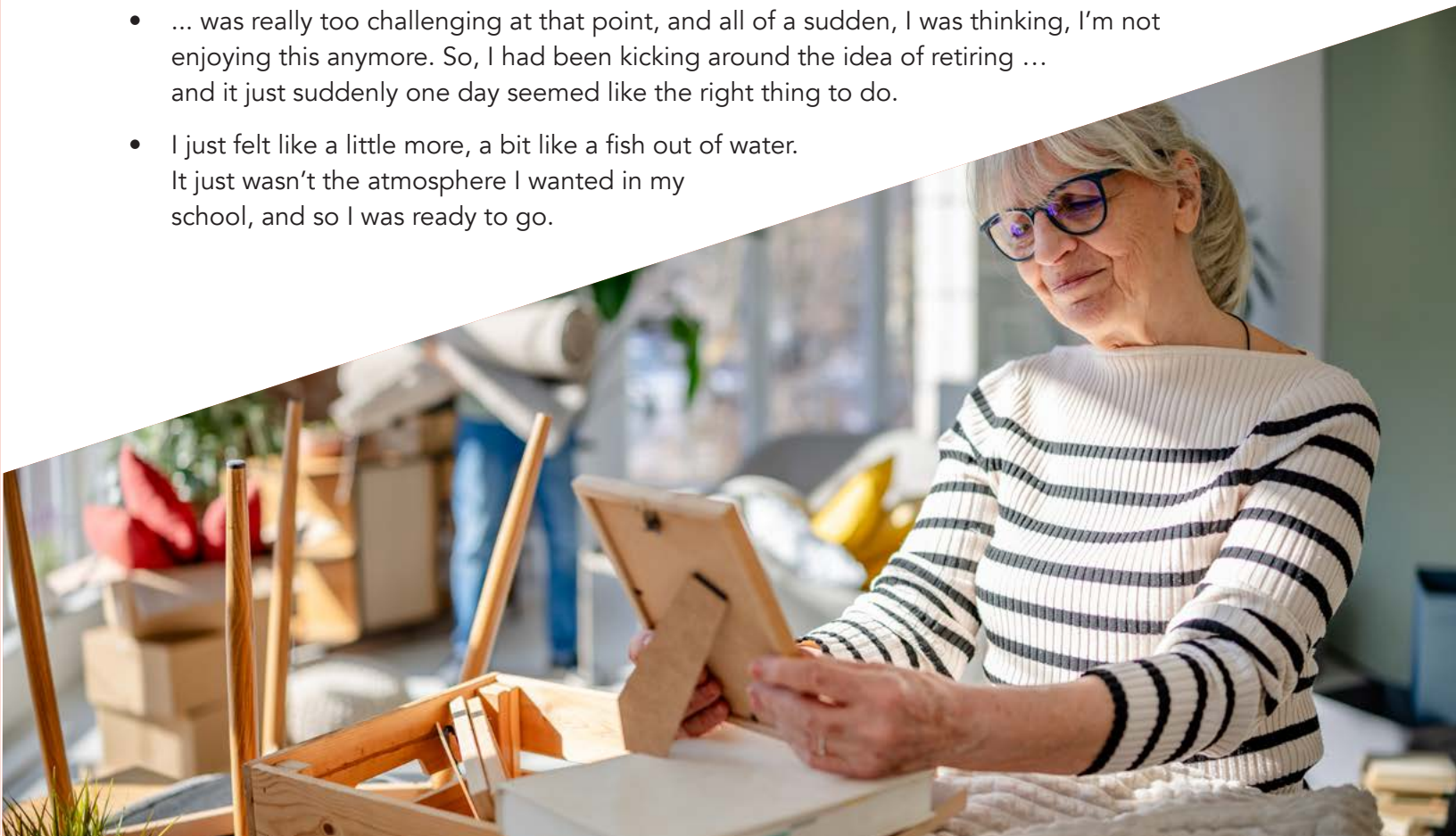
- Nine interviews were held with volunteer female teachers who had superannuated between 2010 and 2020.
- Volunteers were from urban and rural Saskatchewan.
- Interviews were conducted by Zoom.

The Findings

Pre-Retirement Identity Influences

In most cases, teachers' professional identity begins to wane prior to their retirement. The teachers spoke of their increasing awareness of their diminishing capacity to continue working with the same amount of energy and sense of efficacy and joy. In all cases but one, teachers adopted a positive or "I'm ready" mindset as their retirement drew near.

- Decreasing energy, I guess. Noticing my age. I was 60 at the time, and then also the changing face of education. Less and less respect for the teaching position, more and more was the teacher's fault ... it just seemed to be a real switch in the culture since I started until now. It just took some of the joy out.
- And I loved my job. I really liked teaching, and I liked being an administrator, but I just felt like I was getting to be a fish out of water. I just felt like I wasn't as comfortable.
- I had loved my job, and all of a sudden, it wasn't just there anymore; it was a chore, not a joy.
- So, there was just kind of that feeling that I could still do it, but I didn't think I really wanted to do it anymore.
- The job was getting harder on me stress-wise, and so I was realizing that too and actually health-wise, I was struggling with that too.
- ... was really too challenging at that point, and all of a sudden, I was thinking, I'm not enjoying this anymore. So, I had been kicking around the idea of retiring ... and it just suddenly one day seemed like the right thing to do.
- I just felt like a little more, a bit like a fish out of water. It just wasn't the atmosphere I wanted in my school, and so I was ready to go.



Influences on Teachers' Successful Retirement Transition

Our findings show three significant influences that contributed to a positive retirement transition for teachers.

Support

- It was certainly support from my family who were definitely in favour of this. Support from my staff at the time, who said, "Good for you."
- Having friends and colleagues that were already retired. That helped. We could touch base and realize that there is life after this.
- Because it doesn't really feel like you're retired until the first day of school in the fall. And I recognized that I was going to miss it. So, I tried to stay really busy and just made sure that I had people that I went for coffee with and things that I was doing, that I was still on a schedule.
- It made the transition not that difficult. It really wasn't that hard to just follow the steps, you know? And there was always somebody at the other end of a phone if you needed.

Planning

- I set a goal to see my mom once a month in Prince Albert.
- So in many ways, I transitioned very slowly, and I did a lot of subbing in my old school too. I still knew the kids; I still knew the staff coming in; it was just like I never left.
- I think it's very good to have established some hobbies or interests outside of work that you want to pursue. To have some things that actually draw you there or to check out volunteer things.
- I planned to stay involved by subbing, and I just wanted things to be a little more my choice.
- I think I prepared myself in terms of looking at the financial aspect and just thinking in terms of how my lifestyle would change and so on, and I think I was very reasonably prepared.
- Consciously thinking about what things you want to do in your retirement – planning and putting into action specific things that you would like to do to fill your time.
- I planned it out for a few years before I knew it was coming. If there was anything major, I wanted to get done. I wanted to do it before I was retired.



Self-Awareness

- I fill my days with things that I value, activities that I value. I think value would be a keyword for me right now.
- For the first couple of weeks, you kind of lollygag, and then you realize this is not what I want to do. I want to make sure that I have things planned out ahead of time. It's hard to change that.
- And I really recognize that teachers have a huge skillset, and so I just knew I wanted to do some things. Like I wasn't ready to completely stop working, but just, it would look different.
- I think fairly smooth. I mean, a few things to re-examine and all that. But there's always that. Life is change, right? So this was relatively painless.
- It was just very much an emotional break. And I anticipated that's how it was going to be for me, and it was.
- Then when I was pondering, ok, what am I going to miss the most, and I very quickly realized it's not going to be figuring out the budget and reports and everything. It's going to be the connections and the people and the heart aspect of the work that was very strong at the school.
- I had to really adjust my expectations, and once I figured that out, I'm happy.



Challenges to Teachers' Retirement Transition

Teachers acknowledged that they experienced challenges while transitioning to retirement. They reported that some challenges were predictable (e.g., less income, fewer social interactions), others arose unexpectedly (e.g., health concerns, Covid-19).

Adrift

- I was bored out of my mind that fall.
- That sense of being needed, I think that was probably what I was most craving because, you know, you have all of these people who depend on you, then to all of a sudden not. That's a bit shocking.
- Well, I've still got to do something to feel valuable. I just feel like I had to have some sort of – these are the objectives of the day. And so, a plan.
- I did kind of wonder about my own identity. Who am I now? What am I good for? We get so bound up in our teacher persona, and I mean, it is a very rewarding one, but it's not everything. I mean, it felt all-encompassing at the time, so I guess I was a little concerned about what happens now. Who am I? What do I have to contribute to the world?
- I did know that I'm a person that I can't just wake up and like what am I going to do today? I really need to know that somebody needs me, that I have something I have to do, that there's a sense of purpose.
- But I had to find a way to reinvent myself, and I realized I was really unhappy here until I found a way to reinvent myself again and be worthwhile.

Isolation

- It was the lack of collegiality, being away from colleagues and not having that interaction every day.
- But it was just, it was different, you know, places change, people change. And I hadn't been part of that change, right? So, I did feel some, a little bit of disconnect I guess, as time went on.

- I missed the social aspect of the staff.
- Maybe a challenge might have been, maybe just finding replacements for what I missed with friends I had on staff. It wasn't the same. I couldn't just call them up because they're busy, they're prepping, they're doing this, it wasn't the same. It was like having to find a new group of people to socialize with because they're in a whole different category now.

Separation

- I just had to remember that it wasn't mine anymore. I took like great ownership of the gym and the classes and all that. So for me, it was a bit of a challenge to kind of let it go; it's not mine anymore.
- But it took a long time not to be, have my head in what was going on at school I was kind of oblivious, and that was the first time I wasn't going, "Oh yeah, it's November, so it's volleyball time, and it's December, so it's Christmas concert time." Yeah, it took quite a while for that to get out of my system.
- I did miss a lot of things from teaching, especially those times where the door is shut, and you can just mentor these kids, just like read-alouds were such special times. Those times I really missed.
- It just doesn't feel right to go back there ... it's like I do not belong there anymore. This was my space. This library was my space for so long, and now, what am I doing here? And that's how it is. I mean, it has to be like that. It's somebody else's, but it wasn't really a comfortable feeling to go back.

Wise Words

The act of retiring was a significant step for each of the participants. During the interviews, teachers shared their thoughts and advice about what facilitates the retirement experience and the development of a healthy and positive retirement identity.

- The transition. Just knowing that there are lots more doors that are going to open after you're done.
- Most of the time, people know when they are ready to retire. Try to go out on a high.
- I guess just value your own gut feeling and go with that for what makes you healthy.
- And I think that's important too, not to get talked into things and take your time and don't jump into something right away. Give yourself that month, or whatever it is, before you make any bigger decisions that way. And go with your passions.
- You have to be willing to put yourself out there!
- Teachers have so many skills and are amazing people. We can offer so much!
- I think the other thing too is you have confidence in yourself. As I said, you have a skillset that is amazing and that people will want, also know when to say no. Because people will see you retiring and go, "Oh, can you do this? Can you do that?"



The Superannuated Teachers of Saskatchewan (STS)

The Superannuated Teachers of Saskatchewan (STS) is an organization of retired teachers who are dedicated to promoting the interests and welfare of all superannuated teachers and to maintaining the relationships that connect them to the wider community of teaching professionals.

The STS provides a Retirement Lifestyles session for groups of teachers who are considering retirement. The seminar is two to two-and-a-half hours in length and offers information on:

- Transitioning – managing the transition to retirement.
- STS – information on the STS and the STS Health and Dental Plan.
- Retirement Planner – a Financial Planner is in attendance.
- Just in Case – some reminders of information and documents to have in order.

School divisions, local associations, school staffs or groups interested in hosting a Retirement Lifestyles session are invited to contact the STS at (306) 373-3879 or sts@sts.sk.ca.

