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Economics of Education Review

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/econedurev

Knocking on the door to the teaching profession? Modeling the entry of prospective teachers into the workforce



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 17 April 2014

Received in revised form 6 October 2014

Accepted 7 October 2014

Available online 16 October 2014

JEL classification:

I20

J23

J24

J45

Keywords:

Teacher labor markets

Student teaching

Teacher training

Teacher hiring

ABSTRACT

We use a unique longitudinal sample of student teachers (“interns”) from six Washington state teacher training institutions to investigate patterns of entry into the teaching workforce. We estimate split population models that simultaneously estimate the impact of individual characteristics and student teaching experiences on the timing and probability of initial hiring as a public school teacher. Not surprisingly, we find that interns endorsed to teach in “difficult-to-staff” areas are more likely to find employment as public school teachers than interns endorsed in other areas. Younger interns, white interns, and interns who completed their student teaching in suburban schools are also more likely to find a teaching job, all else equal. Prospective teachers who do their internships at schools that have more teacher turnover are more likely to find employment, often at those schools. On the other hand, few of the characteristics of an intern’s cooperating teacher are predictive of workforce entry. Finally, interns with higher credential exam scores are more likely to be hired by the school where they did their student teaching.

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In an era of heightened concern about the economic returns on investments in teacher preparation (or, for that matter, in other higher education programs), data on hiring and placement of teachers is a legitimate component of a broader evaluation of teacher preparation program (TPP) quality. What are the job prospects of TPP graduates? (Anderson & Stillman, 2013)

1. Introduction

The past 20 years have seen a proliferation of empirical research into the composition and distribution of the

teacher workforce. Extensive quantitative work investigates where teachers choose to teach, and the factors that determine whether and when teachers choose to leave the public teaching workforce.¹ But there is far less research on the first step of a teacher’s career path: who enters the teaching workforce in the first place?

The scarcity of empirical research on entry into the teacher workforce is surprising. Teacher training has come under increased scrutiny (e.g. Greenberg, McKee, & Walsh, 2013), and a growing literature investigates the impact of

¹ For instance, for research on where teachers choose to teach see Boyd et al. (2005, 2011, 2013), Maier and Youngs (2009), Reininger (2012); and for research on attrition from the public school labor force see Brewer (1996), Boyd et al. (2008), DeAngelis and Presley (2011), Goldhaber, Gross, and Player (2011), Ingersoll et al. (2012), Krieg (2006), Ronfeldt (2012), Scafidi, Sjoquist, and Stinebrickner (2007), and Stinebrickner (2001).

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pre-service training—either the training program itself (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2009; Goldhaber, Liddle, & Theobald, 2013; Koedel, Parsons, Podgursky, & Ehlert, 2014; Mihaly, McCaffrey, Sass, & Lockwood, 2013) or student teaching experiences (Boyd et al., 2006; Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2008)—on teacher mobility and effectiveness. These studies, however, focus on individuals who decided to enter the teaching workforce and received a teaching job. Many studies do address the factors that influence the decision to get a teaching degree or the decision to enter the teaching workforce,² but lack detailed information about teacher training experiences, student teaching in particular. As such, the existing literature ignores the potential differential effects of pre-service training experiences and intern characteristics on the probability of workforce entry and outcomes after workforce entry.

In this paper, we provide the first quantitatively descriptive look at the process that moves teachers from training programs and student teaching placements into the teaching workforce. Specifically, we focus on the teacher training experiences of “interns” (i.e., students in traditional teacher training programs who complete student teaching and other requirements to receive a teaching credential) from a sample of six training institutions in Washington State. These interns are linked with longitudinal data to allow us to estimate the probability that individuals who obtain a teaching credential end up employed in a public school teaching job, employed in a private school teaching job, employed in a public school non-teaching job, or not employed in any public or private school job within the state.

After investigating the movement of interns into and between these four outcomes, we consider hiring into a public school teaching position or not being hired at all as a binary outcome (dropping the small number of interns in either private school teaching jobs or public school non-teaching jobs), and estimate split population models that simultaneously model the impact of covariates on the timing and probability that an intern finds a public school teaching job.

Controlling for differences in placement rates by training institution and over time, we find that interns endorsed to teach in “difficult-to-staff areas” like math and science (STEM), special education, and English Language Learning (ELL) are far more likely to be employed in public schools (and are employed more quickly) than interns endorsed in other areas. This is also true for younger and white interns. We find little evidence that characteristics of an intern’s cooperating teacher are predictive of entry into the public school workforce.

There is, however, evidence that the type of school in which internships occur matters. Interns who complete their student teaching in a suburban school are more likely to enter public school teaching, as are those who do their

student teaching in a school with high teacher turnover. This finding on teacher turnover is related to the fact that a surprising number of interns, just over 15 percent of all interns hired into an in-state public teaching position, are hired into the same school where they did their student teaching. This is an important and novel finding as it suggests that student teaching serves not merely as a means of training teachers but also as a way for schools with open positions to get an early look at prospective teachers, screening them for fit and ability. In fact, when we investigate this specific type of hiring, modeling the probability that an intern is hired into his or her internship school (as opposed to a different school), we find results that differ from those of the hiring model more generally. For instance, interns with higher credential exam scores are more likely to be hired into their internship school, but are not generally more likely to be employed in public schools.

Our analysis unifies and builds on three strands of the teacher labor market literature: impacts of teacher training and student teacher experiences; recruitment and retention of teachers in difficult-to-staff subject areas; and evidence on teacher workforce entry. We discuss these strands of the literature and provide some context to Washington State in Section 2, describe our data in Section 3, give an overview of our analytic approach in Section 4, and then present our results in Section 5. We conclude with some policy implications in Section 6.

2. Background and context

Pre-service training is seen as a process that is fundamental to influencing the over three million teachers currently employed in the K-12 workforce. Chief among these pre-service experiences is student teaching; as Anderson and Stillman (2013) note, “policymakers and practitioners alike increasingly tout clinical experiences as a key component—even ‘the most important’ component of—pre-service teacher preparation.” While a large literature exists on the impacts of student teaching (see Anderson and Stillman (2013) for a comprehensive review), the vast majority of these studies are case studies with very small sample sizes.³

A small quantitative literature uses substantially larger samples to link various features of teacher training to data on teacher career paths and effectiveness.⁴ Boyd et al. (2006) find evidence that programs that include a capstone project—where teachers relate curriculum learning to actual practices—as part of the student teaching experience tend to produce more effective first-year teachers. Boyd et al. (2008) find that, in terms of students’ math achievement in particular, teachers who identify similarities between their student teaching experience and their

² See Bacolod (2007), Ballou (1996), Boyd et al. (2007, 2013), Engel et al. (2014), Goldhaber and Liu (2003), Goldhaber and Walch (2014), Hanushek and Pace (1995), Ingersoll and Perda (2010), Podgursky et al. (2004), and White et al. (2013).

³ For example, the largest sample size of the many articles reviewed in Anderson and Stillman (2013) is 335, while the majority has sample sizes under 100.

⁴ Several studies also focus on the association between teacher training programs and teacher effectiveness (Boyd et al., 2009; Goldhaber et al., 2013; Koedel et al., 2014; Mihaly et al., 2013). See Goldhaber (2013) for a review.

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