

## CHAPTER ONE

# Your Dream Job and Where to Find It

**C**hanging jobs is not easy. It takes a lot of planning and legwork. As a teacher, you already have a busy schedule. You are going to add to your workload all the tasks involved in making a job transition. Therefore, you want to be sure that every move you make is efficient and effective in taking you closer to your goal.

You may already have your target clearly in focus. Maybe you have taken courses and gotten certified for a particular type of position, such as that of an administrator or reading specialist. In that case, you still need to study carefully the question of *where* you would like to work. Perhaps there is a position available in your current school, and your dream is to stay there. Even if your goal is that specific, you must face the reality that you may not be

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offered that position. What will be your backup plan? What other locations or positions would interest you? Thinking through these questions is part of making a successful job transition.

On the other hand, you may be itching for a change but love teaching and want to continue working in a classroom. Perhaps teaching another grade or subject area, if your school is departmentalized, sounds interesting to you. Or, continuing to teach your current grade or subject but moving to another school might keep you motivated and growing.

First, it helps to be honest with yourself at this stage. Objectively consider your qualifications, strengths, and preferences. Then, imagine the ideal job that would allow you to use those talents in an enjoyable setting. Consider writing out your idea of a dream job so that you can get your vision clearly in focus. It can take more time and effort to make a transition if you do not do this important reflection first. You can end up trying to fit a round peg in a square hole. The interviewers will sense this and will not see you as the perfect person for the job they are offering. On the other hand, you may be able to say the right things and get the job that you are seeking, but you will not feel as satisfied and happy as you had hoped if the new position does not fit you well. Take this part of your job transition seriously. The time you spend will pay off.

### **JOB SETTING QUIZ**

Whether you have prepared yourself for a specific new role, such as guidance counselor or assistant principal, or wish to put additional sparkle into your life with a new teaching assignment, considering the setting of your job is an important first step. The following quiz will help you think about your options.

### **Ideal Job Setting Quiz**

1. I prefer teaching in the following kind of setting:  
Small town  
Big city  
Suburb
2. I am willing to commute the following distance:  
Fifteen minutes  
Up to an hour  
More than an hour
3. Concerning educational philosophies, I tend to be  
Traditional  
Middle of the road  
Very progressive
4. Concerning curriculum decisions, I prefer  
To be given clear step-by-step directions  
To make as many of my own decisions as possible
5. The kind of principal with whom I prefer to work is  
one whose administrative style is  
Fatherly or motherly  
Democratic

### **REFLECTING ON YOUR QUIZ RESPONSES**

Now, take time to think more deeply about your responses to the quiz. This reflection will help you define clearly which type of job setting would make you happy and allow you to be successful. Let's consider each item and its implications.

#### **Setting**

If you have worked in several job settings, you have probably noticed what a tremendous difference your work

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environment can make. The comfort, pace, resources, and parent involvement can differ dramatically from one school to another. Be honest with yourself about this. For example, if you are going to be afraid to go to your car every evening after working at a school in the city or fear coming back for evening events, spare yourself the stress and head for the suburbs or a small town. On the other hand, if the idea of everyone in the community knowing your business makes you feel apprehensive rather than secure, stay away from Smalltown, USA.

To research the setting, take weekend drives or walks around neighborhoods where you think you might like to work. See if you feel safe and comfortable. Go into shops and restaurants. Pay attention to what people are discussing. Buy a community newspaper and note what kinds of stories are news items. Ask a sampling of residents what they like and dislike about living in their town or city. Talk to friends who work in different school settings about the pluses and minuses of each type of location.

Be very objective about this research even if you feel fairly familiar with the area. As the old saying goes, "What you see is what you get." If you fall into the trap of disregarding potential problems, you could be setting yourself up for disappointment later on.

#### **Commute**

How far are you willing to drive on a daily basis? Some people regard travel time as peaceful "free" time to listen to tapes or gather their thoughts. Others hate every moment on the road. Decide what your realistic outer limit of tolerance for drive time is. Notice how far you can drive before you start to feel impatient and regret "wasting time" on the road.

Also consider what *types* of driving you can tolerate. Some people sail through city traffic jams without batting an eye, while others would rather be called in for an IRS audit than navigate through a metropolitan area. Conversely, driving on country roads relaxes some people, while others feel ready to

explode when they find themselves behind a farm tractor moseying down the lane. Take drives to the districts where you are considering applying. If possible, do this during the hours you would normally be commuting. Notice whether the drive makes you feel relaxed or tense. Being an educator is challenging enough; you do not need the commute back and forth to school to cause extra stress if you can help it.

A final issue related to the location of your workplace is whether you think it would be a plus or a minus to live in or near the school district where you work. A longer commute makes it less likely that you will run into Johnny Jones's parents in the grocery store and get tied up for half an hour discussing his math skills. Does that kind of spontaneous encounter sound like an annoyance to you, or would you enjoy being recognized in the community?

## **Educational Philosophy**

There is no one right way to educate children. Some back-to-the-basics programs get wondrous results year after year. On the other hand, there are educators who achieve impressive results by jumping headfirst into the newest educational trends.

You have your own personal philosophy about the best way to educate. Similarly, each individual school has its own philosophy, even though this is tempered by district policy. You will be a lot happier and receive much more support for your dedicated efforts if you are able to match your beliefs with those of the school where you work. Just as a marriage is easier if both people have the same basic values, you will be more likely to be happy and successful if your beliefs match those of the school or schools where you apply. Researching school philosophy is important if you wish to change from one setting to another within the district where you have been working. If you desire to move to an entirely new school district, it is even more crucial to investigate the philosophy of that system as well as how individual schools apply that philosophy.

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**Table 1.1** Determining a District's or School's Philosophy

<i>More Traditional</i>	<i>More Progressive</i>
Heavy emphasis on textbooks and workbooks	Greater use of projects and supplemental materials
Strong focus on standardized tests	More discussion of portfolios, writing conferences, and other means of assessment
Lots of teacher-led discussion and lecture	More group work and student-centered tasks

If you want to find out about the philosophy of a particular district, call the personnel office and ask for a copy of any public relations materials the school system distributes. These booklets, pamphlets, and brochures will highlight the important beliefs of the district. Be aware that you may have to read between the lines to get the message. Similarly, you can request a copy of the school handbook from any school that interests you. Also talk with teachers and parents from that district or school. Find out what they like and dislike about their schools. Notice what they say about key issues. See Table 1.1 for a few suggestions.

The descriptors in Table 1.1 are not foolproof indicators, but they may give you some idea about whether your approach to education would be valued or not.

### Curriculum

As you know, educational philosophy is closely related to curriculum. If you want to continue as a teacher but wish to make a transition to another subject or grade, you owe it to yourself to study the curriculum before applying for a position. Confirm that the content excites you. Determine whether the approach fits your beliefs and style.

In addition to the content and philosophy of the curriculum, there is another important consideration: Determine how much decision-making power you will have as a teacher

**Table 1.2** Types of Curriculum Guides

<i>Highly Structured and Prescriptive</i>	<i>Written to Foster Teacher Decision Making</i>
Uses the word "required"	Uses the words "suggested" and "recommended"
Presents day-by-day lesson plans	Gives general approaches and ideas
Lists required texts and supplemental materials	Suggests a wide range of possible materials
Specifies the number of days for units of study	Gives no time lines for units
Defines a sequence in which skills are to be taught	Promotes the idea of determining the sequence based on student needs

given a district's curriculum for your subject or grade. Honestly assess whether you prefer to have clear, step-by-step directions or whether you are more comfortable with lots of latitude. Approaches can vary greatly from subject to subject even within one district.

Get a copy of the curriculum. Ask a colleague who teaches the grade or subject to let you examine his or hers, or study a copy at the district's staff development or resource center if available. Another alternative is calling the curriculum department of the system's central office and requesting one. A side benefit of undertaking this step is that when you are in an interview situation, the interviewers will be impressed that you already have knowledge of the curriculum. Table 1.2 compares curriculum approaches.

Curriculum philosophy should be considered carefully. If you like being creative and do not like being told what to do, a situation that insists on your adherence to a highly structured and sequenced curriculum will make you feel stifled. Conversely, if you like the security and support of having clearly defined expectations and knowing exactly what to do, a less-structured curriculum will make you feel uncomfortable and not give you a chance to do your best. Be realistic about your needs and match them as closely as possible.

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**Example From a Structured Curriculum****Unit:** Short Story**Lesson:** Plot and Theme**Time:** 50-minute period**Required Materials:**

Language Usage Activity 37  
Overhead Transparency 10  
Pages 128–142 of *Moving Ahead With Literature*  
Worksheet 21

**Objectives:**

The student will

1. Define and identify parts of the plot
2. Find examples of each element of plot in a story

**Procedures:**

1. Use Language Usage Activity 37 for a warm-up activity. (10 minutes)
2. Go over the language usage activity. (5 minutes)
3. Put up Transparency 10 and use it to explain plot. Have students take notes. (10 minutes)
4. Have students read pages 128–142 in their literature books. (15 minutes)
5. Ask students to find examples of each element of plot from the story. (10 minutes)
6. Assign students to do Worksheet 21 on plot for homework.

**Assessment:** Tell students that they will begin tomorrow's class with a short quiz on the notes they took in class.



*Critique*

You can tell that this curriculum is relatively structured because it is broken down into timed segments. The teacher is told exactly what to do and how long to take with each activity. The specific materials to use are spelled out.

**Example From a Less-Structured Curriculum****Short Story Unit****Objectives:**

The students will

- Define plot
- Identify elements of plot in a short story

**Suggested Teaching Activities:**

- Review plot by using plot diagrams. Use a movie that is familiar to students to discuss each element of plot.
- Divide the class into groups. Have each group read a short story from a literature anthology or other source.
- Have each group prepare a plot diagram for its story.
- Provide time for groups to share and compare their diagrams.
- Ask students to diagram the plot of a situation comedy television show for homework.

**Assessment:** Rotate among groups and listen to their discussions. If any points concerning plot need to be clarified, address them with the group.

*Critique*

You can tell that this approach is less structured because the unit is dealt with as a whole rather than being broken into

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time-limited segments. The teacher is given suggestions, but the materials, timing, and the order of instruction are left to the teacher's discretion.

### **Management Style of Administrators**

The building administrator has a strong influence on the school's atmosphere and ultimately on your sense of satisfaction or frustration. Of course, there are effective and ineffective administrators. The reality is that in your career, although you would like to avoid the latter, you are probably going to run into both.

Even among the effective ones, however, there are style differences that you may want to consider. If you seek to simply change your role within your current school, you already know the style of the administrator. You are aware of how this person interacts with teachers. Consider, however, how the administrator works with the person in the role to which you aspire. For example, if you are trying to move into the role of special education teacher, how does the principal make use of that position? Will that approach be fulfilling to you? Will it be consistent with the reason you wish to get into special education?

If you are trying to change the location in which you work, you will also want to determine the management styles of the administrators of the schools you are considering. Try to determine whether a particular administrator is the stereotypic parental type who tends to make all the decisions and policies. The extreme version would be the person who rules "by the book," being very careful that all regulations are spelled out and followed all the time, with no exceptions. This person would suit you if you like to know exactly where you stand and believe that everyone should be treated the same. This type of leadership would attract you if you feel comforted rather than distressed by someone telling you what to do.

At the other extreme are administrators who strive to use a collaborative decision-making process almost all of the time. Those principals generally believe that they should hire good

people and then get out of their way until they need help. In this kind of school, the faculty does not have a father or mother figure to turn to for remedies to problems. Rather, concerns are often turned back to individuals or committees. The people who have identified the situation are then challenged to come up with proposed solutions to be presented to the administrator for final approval. If you bristle at being told what to do and feel more at ease when people make decisions on a case-by-case basis, you would do well to see if you could get a job in a school with this kind of administration.

The best way to research leadership styles of specific principals is to talk with people who know these administrators personally. Find out the impressions of others, especially those who work with them. As an alternative or in addition to that approach, pay attention to the administrator's language when you are in the interview situation. Take advantage of the time at the end of the interview when you are asked if you have any questions to make a couple of inquiries that may give you clues concerning how the principal operates the school.

### **Questions for the Administrator**

- What are some of the accomplishments of this school that make you most proud?
- What are the unique features of the school that make it stand out in the district?
- Do you have a school improvement committee? Who is on that committee, and what are some of the things it does?

As you listen to these answers, and later when you reflect on the interview, think about the kind of language you heard from the administrator. Did you hear a lot of "I" and "my" statements or more "we" and "our" comments? Did this person say "I expect" all the time instead of also using the words

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“suggest” and “recommend”? Also pay attention to your “gut feeling.” Is this a person whom you immediately liked or disliked? Can you see yourself enjoying working with him or her? Most likely, you have learned how to work with the administrator in your current school. There is no reason, as the old saying goes, to jump from the frying pan into the fire by seeking a position in a school where you will clash with the administrative style. The principal of your school will be a key factor in your success through suggestions, support, and formal evaluation of your work.

### WHERE TO LOOK

Once you have a vision of the ideal situation in mind, how do you find a job that will fulfill that vision? Contacts are your greatest asset in unearthing the position of your dreams. Who you know *does* make a tremendous difference. Of course, you are likely to know what is happening in your current school through your on-the-job contacts. If you are interested in moving out, however, educators in other schools and other school districts are your greatest resource. If you do not know educators in those settings, you may have friends and acquaintances who have children in other schools, and they may be aware of staff openings.

At parties, synagogue or church, family gatherings, your doctor’s office, and other places, plan to answer the frequently asked question, “What’s new?” by dropping the information that you are excited about looking for a new position. Keep your ears open for leads, and be sure you are putting your best foot forward with people with whom you are talking. You want acquaintances to think about you favorably in relation to any teaching jobs they hear about.

In some cases, the Internet can also be a useful tool when searching for a job. Some school district Web sites have a “Job Listings” section. In addition, check out the sites of professional educational organizations to which you belong. Some of these list employment opportunities.

Another option is to take a deep breath, gather up your courage, and make some phone calls or visits to schools in the districts where you would like to work. A great deal of care and diplomacy must be used in doing this. Chapter 6 will give you some hints about how to make this a positive and helpful experience.

Before you follow any of the foregoing recommendations, you need to consider carefully the issue of professional courtesy. If you are “blabbing” all over the community that you are interested in a new job but have not told your principal, hard feelings may arise. Many teachers who want to transfer to another school fear the step of telling their current employer. Good administrators, however, understand that some teachers keep themselves fresh by taking on new challenges. In spite of being disappointed to hear you are considering leaving your current assignment, your principal will understand. After all, at some point, that person had to deliver the same message to an administrator to become the leader of your school.

## **FINAL THOUGHTS**

As you can see, thinking about the ideal situation for your talents and personality takes time and effort. In working on a large scale, important project such as changing jobs, planning is a key to success. Take this step seriously, and you will experience less frustration than if you jump in without a strategy. You will also be more likely to find a job that will increase your success and satisfaction and help you develop your skills.