

How Do We “Sell” Science Teaching as a Career?

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Author’s Note: Before I finalized this editorial, there was yet another massacre in a U.S. school that took the lives of 21 people in just a few moments. It was the 27th shooting on U.S. school grounds in 2022 and brings the total number of people killed or injured in school shootings up to 83 so far this year (“School Shootings This Year,” 2022). The problem of gun violence in our society is not confined to our schools, as other massacres and shootings continue to demonstrate; however, it is rarely hospitals, courthouses, engineering firms, or other professional workplaces that are the scenes of such violence. Although the topic of the editorial remained the same, the tone shifted, and it amplified the problem and challenges with this work.

In the previous issue’s editorial, we discussed the STEM teacher shortage and how the COVID-19 pandemic has compelled thinking outside the traditional pedagogical box. We identified this new trend as a possible opportunity to help address underrepresentation and diversity in STEM teaching. Since the publication of that editorial, the National Education Association (NEA) released the results of a survey indicating that 55% of their educator members are considering leaving teaching, with higher rates among Black (62%) and Hispanic/Latinx (59%) members (Walker, 2022). Clearly, to address both issues of equity and teacher shortages, there is a need for the work we discussed in the previous editorial. The work is vital, but it brought up two questions that persist. One, as a professional science teacher educator, am I personally responsible for recruiting people to the teaching profession, the profession to which I belong? And two, how do we convince people to teach science? Or put another way, what is our recruitment argument?

My first question about recruiting people to my profession and to our teacher education program stems somewhat from my feelings about educators not always being treated as educated professionals. Do doctors, lawyers, engineers, or other professionals actively recruit people to their professions? Mentor, yes, but recruit? (Please note that I am distinguishing between the idea of recruiting people to the profession from the idea of inclusive teaching, which involves reducing barriers to entry and fostering retention for all students to address historical and structural inequities within the profession. As mentioned in the previous editorial, the latter work should be done within the profession.) Other professionals do recruit others to their professions, even if my bias does not allow me to see it, but perhaps not on the scale that educators are asked to do so. Whether I like it or not, I think science teacher educators have to make recruitment part of our work. Teacher education programs are closing (Flaherty, 2022), and as mentioned previously, current teachers are burning out and thinking of leaving the profession (Walker, 2022). Furthermore, even without teacher turnover, there is a general teacher shortage (U.S. Department of

Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, 2017). As science teacher educators, we have to work to recruit people to the teaching profession, if for no other reason than the selfish need to be able to continue our work of educating science teachers and improving science teaching. So, the answer to my first question is yes, recruiting others into science teaching is indeed part of the job description of a science teacher educator.

However, it is the answer to my second question about our recruitment argument that eludes me and greatly troubles me. When I talk with a prospective secondary science teacher, and often their parents, I am not able to sell the job well at all. One line I almost always use is, “I can guarantee you will have a job before you graduate and likely a choice of a few jobs.” As mentioned above, I am not lying to them; there are jobs, but there are jobs in lots of fields, especially when you have a science degree, so more is needed. Then, I often find myself defaulting to what feels like pandering platitudes about the joy of teaching, of how the challenges are outweighed by the rewards when students learn and experience the stellar teaching that they will become skilled to offer. There is evidence that those who chose and stay in the profession see their work as a calling (Brunetti, 2001), which I can support by helping them successfully navigate the path to teaching. But given our current challenges, from the lackluster scientific literacy among the public to challenges to curricula and teachers’ professional choices at school board meetings across the United States to the violence we collectively experience in schools, it feels like people might still choose to serve but not in schools. Is there a way to help continue to build on these arguments in better ways than I have come up with?

This is a crisis of conscience, but I continue to ask: How do we sell the profession of education? Some are sharing their recruitment ideas with us, which I appreciate. Steve Maier (2022) shared with ASTE through Facebook recently about efforts to recruit STEM teachers in Oklahoma, stating that their efforts “might generate ideas regarding recruitment for those in other locales.” The video that is linked is from Get the Facts Out (<https://getthefactsout.org/about/>), an NSF-funded partnership seeking to encourage STEM majors to pursue teaching. In this issue of *Innovations*, Dousay et al. (2022) describe a CURE program that they created “to foster identity exchanges contributing to effective science communication and enhanced content knowledge for” science and science education students (p. 7). They report increased interest in teaching from the science students. These feel like great starts with students who are interested in science, but what else do we have? Do we need a new approach with a different pool of people? As I mentioned above, I am asking for selfish reasons and would love to know how others approach this pitch, but I am also sure I am not alone in this desire. Readers of *Innovations*, as science teacher educators, are engaged in this work. Recruiting is an aspect of educating science teachers now, so *Innovations* is a great place to share your ideas and successes for the benefit of us all.

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