

Retaining quality beginning teachers in the profession

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ABSTRACT: Despite increased success in attracting quality graduates into teacher education and growing support for the induction and mentoring of beginning teachers, it is well established in countries in the Western world that between 25% and 40% of all newly-recruited teachers resign or burnout in their first three to five years of teaching. The recent Review of Teacher Education in New South Wales, Australia, highlighted the alarming upward trend in early career teacher resignation rates in NSW over the past four years (Ramsey, 2000, p. 197). This trend, critical in New South Wales, is representative of attrition trends in other Australian States and territories, as well as is in other parts of the world. Further, there are claims that it is the most able who are most likely to leave. Given the resultant wastage of teacher education resources coupled with the impending shortage of teachers (Baird, 2001, p.5) it is imperative to explore the reasons for this trend within the broader context of beginning teacher experiences on entry into the profession. This paper reports data from the first phase of a longitudinal research project (1997-2002) designed to understand more fully the forces that shape the work patterns of beginning and early career teachers both within and outside the classroom. The data reported in this paper focuses specifically on the survey, interview and narrative data of University of Sydney graduates. The paper examines features of the pre-service teacher education programme that participants perceived as valuable in preparing them to teach alongside the structures that were in place to support and sustain them as they began their professional journey.

KEYWORDS: Early career teacher, beginning teachers, mentoring, induction.

Despite increased resourcing to attract quality graduates into teacher education and growing support for induction and mentoring of beginning teachers, it is well established in countries in the Western world that between 25% and 40% of all newly-recruited teachers resign or burnout in their first three to five years of teaching (eg, Australian Senate, 1996; Gold, 1996; Hunt and Carroll; 2003; Ramsey, 2000). The recent *Review of Teacher Education in New South Wales* highlighted the alarming upward trend in early career teacher resignation rates in NSW over the past 4 years (Ramsey, 2000, p. 197). This trend, critical in New South Wales, is representative of attrition trends in other Australian States and territories, as well as is in other parts of the world (Macdonald, 1999).

In *No Dream Denied*, the National Commission's Report on Teaching and America's Future, Hunt and Carroll (2003, p.6) state:

The real school staffing problem is teacher retention. Our inability to support high quality teaching in so many of our schools is driven not by too few teachers entering the profession, but by too many leaving it for other jobs.

Even given the difficulties of comparability of studies of teacher attrition (Macdonald, 1999), analysis of the most recent attrition rates in America demonstrate that a third of America's beginning teachers leave teaching during their first three years and almost half leave during the first five years. In addition, the attrition rate for teachers in disadvantaged schools is almost a third higher. Adequate data on attrition of beginning teachers is not yet available for Australia (Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training, 2002).

Given the resultant wastage of teacher education resources coupled with the impending shortage of teachers (Baird, 2001, p.5) it is imperative to explore the reasons for such early attrition within the broader context of beginning teacher experiences on entry into the profession. In addition, assertions that teachers are ill prepared to teach and manage classrooms especially in rural or isolated areas, are under-prepared in subject content (Ramsey, 2000) and, consequently, burn out, need to be more closely scrutinised. Further, there are claims (eg, Bullough et al. 1992, 1997) that it is the most able who are most likely to leave. Of most importance, however, is the growing realisation that high quality support for beginning teachers will lower the attrition rates (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Loughran, 2001; Macdonald, 1999).

While acknowledging the methodological difficulties in researching beginning teaching and particularly early career attrition as recognised by Macdonald (1999), this paper reports data from the first phase of a project designed to understand more fully the forces that shape the work patterns of beginning and early career teachers both within and outside the classroom. In 2001 a consortium of education faculties from four NSW universities (Newcastle, Macquarie, University of Technology and the University of Sydney) and the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET) worked on a survey and follow-up interviews of beginning teachers across NSW in an initial attempt to probe the experiences of beginning teachers. In particular, this research phase aimed to identify the features of the pre-service teacher education programme that participants perceived as valuable in preparing them to teach as well as the structures that were in place to support and sustain them as they began their professional journey. The data reported in this paper focuses specifically on the survey and initial interview data of graduates from the University of Sydney who were part of that project.

While it is true that there is no "typical" beginning teacher, the literature does highlight a number of issues which are frequently raised by early career teachers. Before examining the survey data, the first section of this paper frames some of the most important issues, using the voices of beginning teachers themselves¹.

¹ All names used are pseudonyms.

ISSUES RAISED BY BEGINNING TEACHERS

While there are numerous issues raised by early career teachers, there are five that appear to be very important and recognised across a broad range of school and community contexts:

- Adjusting to the demands of teaching fulltime
- Negotiating colleague relationships
- Understanding classroom, school and community cultures
- Coping with self: Finding a niche
- The idealism of the pre-service preparation.

These are discussed below.

Adjusting to the demands of teaching fulltime is often cited by beginning teachers as their most challenging task. In particular, programming and classroom management are most frequently nominated as causes for concern by primary teachers. Sam, now in his sixth year of teaching, commented that the programming completed at university “ignores practice and is too theoretical.” For Tammy, a primary teacher who resigned after her first term of teaching, both issues caused concern:

Classroom management was difficult for several reasons...the first was that I had no experience with programming two grades at once and the second that I had disruptive behaviours from a number of students that were constant barriers to the learning activities I planned for the class.

Similarly, Barry and Nancy, both secondary English/History teachers cited classroom management as difficult. In Barry’s words: “What do you do when a student tells you to f••• off? Simply changing the seating plan is not effective!” Nancy, a mature-aged graduate and parent who had been targeted for graduate employment in an all boys’ school, encountered a lot of sexual harassment as a regular part of her first few months of teaching which other teachers described as “harmless teenage pranks”. In the English Faculty there was an expectation that she would perform extra duties and she found herself developing registers for the whole department and organising visits from year six students to the school.

Negotiating colleague relationships can also be daunting, especially given the continued “greying” of the profession and the fact that a beginning teacher is a rarity in some schools. Vicki, in her third year teaching kindergarten, found “other staff standoffish because of my youth and the fact that I was targeted. I was left to my own devices. There are five of us teaching Kindergarten. We divided up the programming tasks, went away and returned to piece together our programmes. This was fairly non-collaborative. New teachers need to be inducted into a supportive environment, leadership needs to be shared and modelled and new teachers need to understand how decisions in the school are made.”

Nancy was the first beginning teacher at the school for a number of years. In an attempt to provide support, Nancy’s Deputy Principal performed a student supervisor-like role, sitting at the back of her classroom and then making comments. She found

this intrusive and embarrassing and not respectful of her qualified teacher status. Barry, on the other hand, had useful fortnightly discussions with his English Head teacher and several other beginning teachers.

Confronting hierarchical structures and power bases built on duration of teaching at a school can be very difficult. For Kate, beginning her career in a Catholic girls' secondary school, this issue posed enormous challenges: "I didn't know how to navigate what was an obvious power relationship ...I didn't know how to tell her that her expectations of me were too high." Kate resigned from this position after a year. Muoi, now teaching year one for the second year, is unsure of how long she will stay teaching because, while she loves the classroom, she is disturbed by the cynicism of many of her colleagues and overwhelmed by the administrative demands,

For Jane, whose first year of teaching was in a Greek community school, this attitude was manifested in not allowing her to teach the way she wanted to. Sadly, it also led to her resignation at the end of her first year of teaching. She commented: "Basically I was treated like 'you don't know anything'...I wasn't expecting to march in and change everything....It was just simple enthusiasm...."

A recent seminar of a group of more than sixty beginning teachers suggested that principals and experienced school staff need to be reminded of the need of beginning teachers to work alongside new staff and to make an effort to make them feel part of the school community. It was a salient reminder that too often professional development about the needs of beginning teachers is only arranged for those new to the profession.

Understanding staff room, school and community cultures continues to be an on-going concern for beginning teachers. There is a limit to how much induction manuals can communicate about taken-for-granted norms and rituals that have grown up in a school or faculty communities. Beginning teachers often find themselves unprepared for the politics of the staffroom. Kate wrote:

I wasn't prepared for how much of me, how much of myself would be embedded in these relationships and how difficult classroom and school cultures would be to negotiate. How do you work in a school that professes an ethos of care and attacks those who don't fit their mould?

Elsewhere she refers to "the....huge generational cleft...unfamiliarity with the independent system and being at odds with the 'old girl' mentality."

During her internship in a large primary school, Muoi found that she stopped going to the staffroom. She explained that "I've been used to the corporate world but I've never experienced the level of tension that I found in the staffroom...I couldn't handle the way the teachers talked about each other or the children." This problem needs to be addressed by school and faculty communities. While some of these feelings are unavoidable in any new workplace initially, it is important to find ways to make our beginning teachers feel part of the staff rather than interlopers. A spirit of collegiality and collaboration needs to be fostered. While Sam initially found the politics of the staffroom difficult, new teachers arrived who have been more accepting of his ideas. "I'm passionate about English and Art and I've developed a programme on *Macbeth*

for primary students. My colleagues have noticed the positive effect of this on my students and are now more accepting of my progressive ideas. But making my ideas more acceptable to them has been challenging.”

In addition, many beginning teachers are concerned about how they will **relate to the parent community**. “As a new teacher I found it difficult to know how to interact with parents.” says Sam. In some cases, parents have also expressed concern about their children being in the class of a beginning teacher. This attitude may in part be due to the general perception that beginning teachers are inferior to experienced ones. Sometimes this attitude is implicitly encouraged by the school executive. Tammy’s principal, for example, refused to tell the parents that she was in her first year of teaching.

Coping with self: Finding a niche

It is interesting to note that many beginning teachers initially don’t recognise how much of their own self-esteem and self-efficacy is integral to their professional identity as a teacher. Kate commented:

I had known teaching would be professionally tough. I hadn’t thought much about how your self-esteem, your self-worth and your sense of self is invested in your vision of yourself as a teacher. I loved my years of undergraduate study – I was an able student, I worked hard and this hard work was always rewarded with high grades....On reflection I see that my success was grounded in a traditionalist conception of education....The move to classroom teacher was therefore a fracturing experience....

While acknowledging that beginning teachers have a range of issues and concerns to attend to, it is also important that schools find a way to recognise the strengths that beginning teachers bring to the classroom and school community. In the words of one Assistant Principal, discussing a beginning teacher’s impact on a staff where there had not been a beginning teacher for twenty five years: “Nadine has changed the dynamics of our staff with her freshness and enthusiasm. She works so hard – she’s there at dawn and often the last to leave.” Beginning teachers can challenge experienced staff to think about some of the teaching and learning practices they have taken for granted. Eve explained: “I set up my classroom in small groups. After the holidays the teacher next door had done the same saying ‘just thought I’d give it a go’.” In addition, their knowledge of current curriculum documents and new teaching and learning strategies is often up-to-date and can be shared with other staff. Nadine was pleased that “because of my knowledge of grammar I got put on the English committee. I feel I’ve had a positive impact on that committee.” This contrasts with James’ experience. He was told firmly that “new teachers are usually expected to *ask for*, not *give* ideas!”

A number of beginning teachers commented that their **university preparation was too idealistic**. In Michelle’s words: “We went out with our rose-coloured glasses.”

In discussing the alienation that she felt as a beginning teacher in a very experienced staff, Tammy writes: “My undergraduate training prepared me for none of this....”

At the same time, it is important to set high expectations and goals if change in traditional school cultures is to occur. Some beginning teachers experienced pressure to conform and to sacrifice their ideals. Gary was “called headstrong” and told that he “was not working as part of the team” because his philosophy differed to his supervisor’s. Nadine was told that “in a few years time, you wait, you’ll go back to the old method.”

The experiences of beginning teachers as illustrated in the literature and exemplified above lead to a number of important issues for urgent research. These may be summarised in the research questions below:

- What are the most important factors perceived by beginning teachers to facilitate and support their successful entry into teaching? How do these factors work together to achieve this?
- What are the major problems and issues perceived by beginning teachers that undermine their successful entry into teaching? What suggestions for solutions do they have for these problems/issues?
- Do the experiences and problems encountered by beginning teachers differ significantly with the school contexts in which they commence teaching (eg, state/independent; primary/secondary; city/rural, etc)?
- Is there a relationship between the experiences of those students who are “targeted” for immediate employment and their ongoing success in the profession or otherwise?
- Is there a relationship between the perceived effectiveness of the pre-service programme (from the perspective of the beginning teacher) and retention of the beginning teacher in the profession?
- What principles/characteristics of teacher education programmes result in successful early teaching in NSW (eg. the inclusion of an internship)?
- What are the major themes of beginning teaching that can be identified in the stories of beginning teachers in their first three years of teaching? How can these themes inform both decision-makers in both universities and employing authorities concerning provision to optimise the entry into teaching by beginning teachers and their longer term retention?

The research undertaken in 2001 by the NSW consortium of universities and the NSW DET attempted to provide some initial answers to these questions. The next section of the paper provides details of the questionnaire and sample and an in-depth examination of the responses by the graduates from the University of Sydney to the questionnaire items.

THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire consisted of 33 items. These were divided into four main sections:

- Personal Details (gender, age, cohort of graduation and current employment);
- Experience of Pre-service Education (choice of teaching, choice of university, type of programme, perception of competence in a range of areas, suggested improvements);
- Experience of Beginning Teaching (induction and mentoring and those responsible and suggested improvements);
- Current Teaching (satisfaction and competence; professional growth and expectations regarding career).

While many of the items required rankings on a four or six-point Likert scale, opportunities for extended comment were provided for each set of items at the end of each section and at the end of the questionnaire. The majority of respondents took advantage of this. In addition, respondents were offered the opportunity of follow-up interviews and about one third of the sample indicated their willingness to do this. Interviews with these teachers are currently proceeding and will provide deeper insights into the meanings behind some of the patterns of responses.

STUDENT SAMPLE

At the time of the research, the Faculty of Education at the University of Sydney offered two pre-service teacher education programmes. One was a four-year Bachelor of Education degree for intending primary and secondary teachers.² This had an annual cohort of some 150 primary and 100 secondary students. This programme is designed for high school leavers who have made an early decision to teach. The second was the Master of Teaching, a two-year graduate programme for students making a later decision to enter teaching. The average age for these students is generally older (about 31 years). The annual cohorts consist of 70-80 primary and 150-200 secondary students.

There were 196 respondents to the questionnaire. This represented a return rate of between 30-40%. A higher rate of return was prevented because of administrative errors in the University in relation to alumni addresses.

Of the sample, 36 (18%) were male and 155 (82%) female. 74 (38%) were primary teachers and 120 (62%) secondary. While this proportion is representative of the Master of Teaching programme it is under representative of the numbers of primary students in the Bachelor of Education degree. However, as will be seen in Table 1 below, the proportions of the total sample are not represented in the respondents from each cohort year.

² The Faculty of Education and Social Work at the University of Sydney now offers Double Degrees for those preparing to teach Secondary alongside the B.Ed (Primary and Human Movement and Health). The Master of Teaching is a post-graduate primary and secondary pre-service teacher education degree.

Table 1. Details of Sample Programme

Table of Graduation					
	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
B.Ed-Sec'dry	No data	No data	10	9	18
B.Ed - Primary	No data	No data	10	8	18
MT- Sec'dry	18	16	22	28	No data
MT- Primary	5	5	10	18	No data

At the time of the research 97 (57%) of the respondents worked in public schools, 16 (9%) in Catholic schools and 48 (28%) in other independent schools. 94 (50%) held permanent positions, 12 (6%) were permanent part time, 32 (17%) were casual teachers and 19 (10%) were not teaching. 38 provided no response.

CHOOSING TEACHING AS A CAREER

In sum, the reasons for choosing to teach reported by respondents were arguably all extremely positive and reflected the ideals we as teacher educators might hope for. The following results are combined totals of recorded rankings of “Important”/“Very Important”/ “Extremely Important”. The only reason attracting more than 50% of “Extremely Important” and a combined total of 97% of the sample was “satisfying career”. “To promote student learning” also was recorded by 97% of the sample. These were followed by “contribute to society” (94%), “helping others” (93%); “working with young people” (86%). These strong expressions of focussing on assisting young people in learning were followed by less strong but still important levels of expression of “opportunity for professional growth” (85%), “sharing academic knowledge” (78%) and “working in a community” (72%). Flexibility in personal lifestyle was a reason indicated by 65% of respondents.

EXPERIENCE IN PRE-SERVICE EDUCATION

The first item in this section asked for a reflective ranking, first, of the perceived relevance of, and, second, degree of satisfaction with the particular pre-service teacher education course. As reported in the first section of this paper, it is not uncommon for teachers to criticise strongly their pre-service preparation. Thus it was heartening to find respondents expressing strong levels of perceived relevance and satisfaction. This of course may partly reflect a bias of the respondents who bothered to return the questionnaire. Table 2 below summarises the results:

Table 2. Levels of Perceived Relevance and Satisfaction

	Rankings			
	Very High	High	Moderate	Low/ V.Low
Relevance	35 (18%)	98 (51%)	45 (24%)	13 (7%)
Satisfaction	22 (12%)	91 (48%)	59 (13%)	20 (10%)

While there was no significant difference in expressed levels between the two programmes, perceptions of competence in different aspects of the programmes, provided in Table 3 below, helps to provide some guide to areas of dissatisfaction.

The second item in this section asked for perceptions of general teaching competence at the end of the course. Again nearly half of the respondents (49%), irrespective of programme recorded either perceived “high” or “very high” levels of competence. A further 44% recorded their level of competence as “moderate”. Thus a total of 89% of the respondents perceived themselves as competent at the end of their pre-service preparation. This is an important finding given the NSW Auditor General’s current claims that many teachers are incompetent (reported *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14/5/03).

The next part of the Questionnaire probed this general level of competence more deeply. It asked for perceived levels of competence at the end of the teacher education programme, on a four-point scale, for 12 key areas of teaching identified from literature and relevant to the NSW policy context. The results for these are summarised in Table 3 below. The unbracketed results show reported perceived levels at the end of the pre-service education programme while results in brackets show perceived levels of competence at the time of completing the questionnaire (ie, after 1- 5 years of teaching).

While again, there were no important differences in the pattern of results due to programme type, there are some important issues that emerge from the data. Arguably, one of the important factors in retaining teachers is the preparation they experience in their pre-service education and the degree that this prepares them for their professional work. While on the one hand, results in Table 3 are positive for a number of areas (eg, lesson planning (96%); knowledge of subject (86%); knowledge of teaching and learning strategies (85%); identification of and catering for individual differences (75%); relating to students (93%); ability to self evaluate (90%) and reflect (92%)) including classroom management, where 75% of respondents expressed competence, arguably these are all areas in which it would be expected that pre-service teacher education has excelled, and should excel. What is of some concern, however, are the low levels of perceived competence that were recorded in areas of recent curriculum and pedagogical change (eg, outcomes-based programming, assessment and reporting and information technology) and, arguably, where it would be expected that beginning teachers should be better prepared than those who have been teaching for some time. There are some clear implications from

the data for changes in the curriculum of the programmes at Sydney. It

Table 3. Perceived Levels of Competence in Key Areas

Key Area	Extremely Competent	Very Competent	Competent	Not Competent
Lesson Planning	29% (33%)	34% (40%)	33% (23%)	5% (3%)
Programming	9% (28%)	25% (39%)	30% (28%)	35% (13%)
Subject Matter K	17% (19%)	34% (53%)	35% (28%)	15% (5%)
T'ing/L'ing Strats	9% (13%)	30% (43%)	46% (40%)	15% (4%)
Assessment	3% (11%)	20% (39%)	42% (41%)	34% (10%)
Info Technology	14% (21%)	23% (30%)	34% (34%)	29% (15%)
Outcomes Rep't	5% (12%)	21% (40%)	36% (37%)	38% (11%)
Individ Diff's	11% (17%)	22% (38%)	42% (34%)	25% (11%)
Relate to Studnts	30% (49%)	42% (35%)	21% (13%)	7% (2%)
Cl'rm M'ment	9% (20%)	28% (38%)	40% (31%)	24% (11%)
Self Evaluate	24% (24%)	35% (45%)	31% (25%)	10% (6%)
Reflectiveness	26% (29%)	40% (41%)	26% (25%)	8% (6%)

will remain to be seen whether these areas can be successfully addressed in pre-service preparation or whether, as is arguably the case with classroom management, specific context is such an important factor that practical competence in these areas can only be effectively developed as part of context specific professional development. Either way, the data have important implications for changes in teacher education.

Predictably, from the data in Table 3, when respondents were asked for suggestions as to improvements in their pre-service teacher education programmes, they identified classroom/student management (12%), programming (12%), more professional experience (10%) and outcomes-based assessment and reporting (8%) as the four areas for attention. A higher incidence of response was recorded by those working in non-public schools, those working as casual teachers, particularly in rural areas, and those in senior secondary schools where recent changes to the final external examination and related syllabuses have been extensive. Each of these areas is also well supported in previous research (eg, DETYA, 2002; Hatton & Harman, 1997).

What is also important is to compare results from Table 3, which to some extent is an expression of the areas requiring attention in any induction programmes for these beginning teachers, with the areas that were addressed in the induction programmes provided to them. This comparison will be undertaken in the next section of the paper.

INDUCTION AND THE EXPERIENCE OF BEGINNING TEACHING

Recent changes to policy and practice in the state schools of NSW have mandated induction programmes (NSW, DET, 1999). Recent reports on teacher education (eg, Ramsey, 2000) have highlighted the importance of, but inadequate provision of,

induction programmes and structures in teaching as compared to other professions. A further important factor, maybe the most important factor, in retaining beginning teachers is the induction they receive into the profession (Hatton & Harman, 1997). Thus, the next section of the questionnaire investigated this experience.

The first items in this section of the questionnaire asked for information related to the use of different forms of induction and the format of induction sessions. Table 4 provides a summary of the results regarding forms of induction.

There are some important observations to be made concerning these results. The first and most striking is that it was informal support that was the most important form of induction for the large majority of the respondents. On the one hand, this is not totally unexpected and the notion of colleagues helping each other in informal ways is an important form of learning about teaching and of professional development. On the other hand, informal support is often an act of serendipity. There is no guarantee that it will occur nor of the quality of such informal support. The danger is of beginning teachers, who for many reasons feel isolated and unable to seek informal support or for whom

Table 4. Ratings of Different Forms of Induction

Form	N	Very Low/Low	Moderate	High	Very High	Not Provided
Materials	130	38%	32%	21%	9%	N = 50
Principal	131	42%	33%	15%	11%	N = 48
Executive	152	34%	32%	18%	16%	N = 26
Mentor	98	41%	18%	16%	26%	N = 78 ***
Formal		35%	25%	28%	12%	N = 56
Session	121					
Informal		13%	17%	35%	35%	N = 8
Support	170					

informal support, often in the contexts which most demand it, are not available (eg, a difficult school where there are many young teachers trying to survive). Further, the induction of beginning teachers is an important area of management and leadership, and there are those who in schools are charged with such responsibilities. What is disturbing about the data in Table 4 is the very low level of reported involvement of the principal (60% moderate to high) and particularly the executive (65%) in the induction of these beginning teachers. Arguably, it is both of these groups who should have a major responsibility in the induction of new staff. Certainly such data would make interesting comparisons with the corporate sector.

The formal provision of a mentor has been recognised clearly in the literature (eg, Feiman-Nemser, 2000; Weiss, 1999; Hatton & Harman, 1997) as a central action in the effective induction of student teachers. State schools in NSW are expected to provide beginning teachers with supervisors. Linking beginning teachers with mentors is also strongly encouraged by the NSWDET. Of 98 respondents who replied to the question, 78 (75%+) reported that no mentor was provided. These data are

supported by a later question which asked "Did you have a mentor?" Of the 175 replies only 40% (70) had a mentor. Of these, only 33 had any choice of who their mentor was. Previous findings suggest that since the most important element of mentoring is a relationship built on risk and trust, then some choice by the beginning teacher is very important. What is even more disturbing is that half the respondents also did not have a supervisor. Thus, for over half of the respondents, there was no teacher who was assigned to have a special responsibility for assisting the beginning teacher. Ramsey (2001), in his extensive review of teacher education in NSW, has pointed to the serious weaknesses in induction of beginning teachers as compared to all other professions.

A similar picture of inadequate and unmanaged induction emerges from the data on the format of induction sessions. Only 12% of the respondents reported systematic and regular sessions for the whole year. A further 13% reported regular sessions in the first two terms (ie half a year). No respondents reported any continuation of induction sessions beyond the first year of teaching, something that has been recognised as very important in not only the continuing professional development of young teachers but also their retention (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). In many cases the induction programme was very brief, lasting only a day or a few sessions. This has serious implications regarding the seeming lack of any systematic professional development and professional learning, which is the basis of creating schools as professional learning communities (Ewing, 2001; Feiman-Nemser, 2000; Weiss, 1999; Senge, 2000). More than half of the respondents reported either single sessions (30%) or multiple irregular sessions.

One of the key factors in the retention of beginning teachers is a supportive induction into their specific school and the teaching profession more broadly. State schools in NSW are expected to provide beginning teachers with induction programmes. Unfortunately, the data reported above does not provide any basis for a strong and effective induction into teaching by the respondents. What is also interesting is to look in more detail at the key areas of teaching and its work that the induction sessions, if any, focussed on. What is also interesting is to compare these results with those of perceived competence recorded in Table 3 above.

The next section of the questionnaire asked respondents to rank the quality of support provided during induction to the 12 areas identified in Table 3 and five additional areas related to working in schools and in the NSW policy context. The results of these rankings are provided in Table 5 below. Also identified are those areas where respondents perceived low levels of competence at the end of their course (*), those which were suggested as areas for improvement in their pre-service programmes (+) and those that have been identified in the literature, as problem areas for beginning teachers (@).

Table 5. Ranking of Quality Support Provided During Induction

Area	Ranking					
	VLow/ Low	Moderate	High	Very High	No Provisn	No of Replies
Less Plan	56%	30%	13%	0%	85	82
*+@	46%	30%	15%	9%	64	103
Programme						
Subj Matter	54%	27%	14%	5%	58	110
T&L Strats	44%	31%	21%	4%	41	126
*+ Assessm	44%	32%	17%	8%	36	133
*Info Tech	56%	29%	11%	4%	36	118
*+ Outc.	46%	30%	18%	7%	35	134
Reportng						
Indiv Diffs	52%	31%	13%	4%	39	127
Rel to Stud	46%	28%	22%	4%	42	124
*@Clrm	41%	26%	26%	7%	34	133
Mangmnt						
Eval T'ing	52%	34%	13%	2%	54	110
Reflective	45%	34%	18%	5%	53	112
@ Rel Staff	40%	32%	20%	8%	23	140
& Commnty						
@School	24%	27%	30%	20%	10	158
Routines						
Schl Policy	27%	30%	23%	19%	12	154
Edcn Policy	28%	27%	27%	19%	17	153
Legal Resp	32%	26%	27%	15%	23	146

There are some important issues from the data reported in Table 5. First, it would be expected that the majority of time in any induction programme would focus on specific school and community issues. This is indeed reflected in the data where it is the areas of school routines and policies that attract the highest incidence of quality support during induction, although it is puzzling as to how the 10 or more respondents learnt about school policies and routines without some sort of induction. Second, a number of the areas in which high levels of "low" or "very low" support were recorded are in areas where this would be expected because they were areas which were emphasised in pre-service teacher education and in which the respondents felt relatively competent (eg, lesson planning; subject matter; teaching and learning strategies; relating to students; evaluating teaching and being reflective of practice).

There are, on the other hand, however, some issues for concern. First, the area recording the second highest ranking was educational policies and nearly the same ranking was given to legal responsibilities. Arguably, both of these areas are largely non-context specific. Further, student teachers in both programmes spend considerable time in their coursework and in their professional experience learning about the policy, legal and ethical contexts of NSW schooling and of teaching as a profession more generally. Given the time constraints of pre-service teacher education it seems unprofitable to be spending large amounts of course time in pre-service if much of that is going to be repeated in induction programmes, or vice versa.

There is a clear implication here for negotiations with employing authorities so that the productive use of time in both pre-service preparation and in-service induction can be maximised. This is not to say that it will not be necessary to spend some time on the implications of a specific context for policy and child protection issues during induction but maybe not as much time as is apparent at present.

The second, and maybe more worrying concern is the lack of induction time spent on those areas that respondents perceived themselves as lacking in competence (ie, programming; assessment and outcomes reporting; and classroom management). Combining this data with that relating to the lack of appointment of a mentor means that many of the beginning teacher respondents began teaching feeling a lack of competence in some key areas of their work and with no formal support. Further, it indicates that at least some of the induction programmes experienced by respondents were not based on their professional needs. The lack of support and professional development in areas of perceived need certainly do not assist beginning teachers to want to commit themselves to teaching. Again there are important implications for the management of schools to investigate the professional learning needs of their beginning teachers before planning induction programmes.

The next section asked for information concerning the nature of support received from mentors and supervisors. 164 respondents provided answers to this question. Of these, 34% indicated they received no or very little support. This is certainly of concern and correlates with the data reported already concerning the lack of mentors for respondents. Further, it was those respondents who were casual teachers, and particularly those teaching in city schools, who reported most lack of support. 10% (17) of respondents indicated that their mentor or supervisor had provided feedback/advice, had observed lessons, had assisted in planning and programming and had held beginning teacher meetings. Again the lack of support provided in this data is of serious concern. It is interesting to note that in an area of clearly recognised difficulty, that of programming – partly because of its context specific nature – only 10% of respondents reported any assistance.

In regards to improving induction, it is telling that 25% of the 127 respondents, regardless of programme type, said "provide a mentor" and 15%, particularly those teaching casually, said that regular meetings with their mentor would improve things. 16% also suggested more time on information about the specific school and its policies. Only 12 suggested a reduced teaching load.

Of 167 respondents to the question, 90% rated their current satisfaction with their teaching position as "moderate" to "very high", with the highest percentage, 40% rating it as "high". Thus, in spite of all the difficulties noted in the data with lack of support and poor induction, still 90% of the respondents were satisfied with their current workplace. While there were 57 different categories of responses from 157 respondents as to reasons for the ratings, most were single response categories. The eight strongest categories of reasons included, "good support from management" (10%), "support from colleagues" (8%), "support from students" (7%), "opportunity for growth and change" (7%), "enjoyment of classes" and "teaching the subject" (5%). The three main negative reasons, all attracting 4% of respondents, were "lack of support", "student behavioural problems" and "personal stress". While one interpretation of these figures based on the low level of negative responses could be

positive, there is a nagging question as to why only 10% mentioned support from management and colleagues. Like all questionnaires, the answer could lie in the unwillingness of respondents to take time to provide reasons in the open response section. On the other hand, one would hope that more than 10% experienced support from management and colleagues. In the light of the previous data reported concerning informal support, it might be concluded that the data above under-represents the actual picture. This is one pattern of data that will be investigated in further interviews.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The final section of the questionnaire investigated respondents' professional growth. Much of this concerned open responses that cannot be reported in detail in this paper. These related to perceived professional successes and problems both in the classroom and the school. There were a wide variety of these related to the number of years of teaching and the contexts of teaching. Concerns about programming, outcome-based assessment and reporting and classroom management were all common, as were difficulties in negotiating the culture of the school. Thus, the key areas identified in previous research (eg, Weiss, 1999; Hatton & Harman, 1997) and in the current research as being problems for beginning teachers were again reinforced. The open responses to these questions are currently being collated and analysed and will be the focus of a subsequent report.

One other aspect of this section of the questionnaire was a rating of the level of commitment to teaching. Responses to this have already been reported in an earlier section of this paper. To reiterate, 93% (162) of the respondents rated their then current commitment as "moderate" (41), "high" (65) or "very high" (41). Thus, the respondents were a committed group of young teachers.

The final question asked for an indication of how long each respondent expected to be a member of the teaching profession. In response to this, while 44% of 173 respondents stated they believed they would be teachers for more than 10 years, nearly the same number reported that they would leave teaching within ten years, 27% within five years. This data reflects other Australian and international data (Macdonald, 1999) as to the dropout rate of beginning teachers. Such data raises important questions. Would this level of dropout continue despite improvements in induction and support for beginning teachers? If so, does this signal a major restructuring of the workforce that will comprise teaching in the future? If this indication is correct, does it mean that teaching will become a relatively short-term career for young teachers who will seek to change careers after about ten years? If so, this has major implications for a continuing supply of teachers into the profession. Or, are the main reasons for teacher dropout caused by lack of effective induction and support in the early years of teaching? Data from the present study are somewhat contradictory on this point. If 93% of the respondents declared satisfaction with their current position, yet 43% suggest that they will leave within ten years then maybe there are other reasons that are more allied to a reconstruction of the future teaching workforce. These are questions that are currently being investigated through the interviews with respondents in the current research and through another research project which is gathering the stories of those beginning teachers who have left the

profession. Maybe data from these projects will be able to answer these questions.

CONCLUSION

The current exploratory study sought to investigate some of the factors that have been identified as possibly contributing to the retention or loss of beginning teachers. In NSW, there has been a high expenditure of time and resources to attract high quality candidates into teaching. However, figures indicate that while the government has been highly successful in attracting good quality beginning teachers, it has not been successful in retaining them. Statistics suggest that between 30% and 40 % leave teaching within ten years.

The current research investigated the pre-service and beginning experience of 196 beginning teachers from the Bachelor of Education and Master of Teaching programmes at the University of Sydney, Australia. Findings indicate that respondents are strongly committed to teaching and are generally well satisfied with their current teaching positions. However, given this, still some 43% do not see themselves teaching beyond ten years. Thus the anticipated dropout rate is similar to that reported for Australia and internationally and is of serious concern for the future demand and supply of teachers and the management of beginning teachers in the profession. This is even more concerning given that the average age of teachers in NSW is 48-49 years and that within the next ten years more than 50% of the teaching workforce is expected to retire, (though this may be balanced by the lower numbers of births in the Australian population which may result in some reduction in the demand for new teachers).

While there has been longstanding criticism of the pre-service preparation of teachers, data in the current study does not confirm such criticism. Generally, the respondents, regardless of programme type, are satisfied with their pre-service preparation and feel competent to begin teaching except for three main areas related to programming, assessment and reporting, and classroom management – all areas identified in previous Australian and international research.

While satisfied with their pre-service preparation, they are certainly not satisfied with their induction. The data suggests that for a majority of respondents, their introduction into the first year of teaching is neither systematic or well planned and managed. The data suggests that those who should be most responsible for such induction – principals and executive staff – are not fulfilling their responsibilities and that the majority of beginning teachers (70%) are left to find informal support. Further, the areas of professional development clearly identified by the respondents do not form the basis of any induction or professional development programme for the majority of the respondents. In addition, no respondent suggested that there was any induction programme beyond the first year, and for most it stopped after two terms.

Such findings raise serious questions that need to be urgently addressed by teacher employing authorities, individual schools and systems. There is no doubt that the data indicates an urgent need to provide well managed, effective induction programmes at school, district and system level that go beyond the first year of teaching and are

based in the professional learning needs of beginning teachers. The data, however, also raises a conundrum. Even given the poor or nil induction of the majority of respondents, they are still highly committed and satisfied young teachers of whom over 40% indicate that they will still leave teaching within ten years. Thus, it may not be poor induction practices that are the reasons for such low retention. Possibly there are more important factors concerning changes in the nature and structure of the teaching workforce away from the traditional notion of a career teacher who would remain in teaching as a lifetime career. If true, such findings have even more urgent implications for the policy and practice of government and employers related to the employment of teachers. The answers to such questions lie in a much more intensive and in-depth research methodology investigating the lives and stories of beginning teachers of today.

Having identified the factors and issues reported in the paper, the next phase of the project will chart the continuities and discontinuities in the continuum from pre-service to initiation into the teaching workforce by a further development of narratives of beginning teachers alongside narratives of those who have chosen to leave the profession in the first few years. It will also determine the kinds of professional development necessary to optimise beginning teachers' longer-term career choices.

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