



'Teacher education and employing authorities need to take seriously the different planned career trajectories of people who come into their programs.'

It is critical we better understand the links between individual motivations, perceived abilities, professional engagement, and the support networks and strategies needed to sustain teachers – particularly in difficult to staff regions, districts and schools.

In our ongoing study we now have data that will allow us to examine the environmental and organisational components of schools that have the potential to impact negatively on teachers' job demands, perceived stress, and levels of psychological and physical health.

We aim to shed light on the current early career demands associated with the teaching profession, the persistence plans of early career teachers and their general health and wellbeing, and provide a more accurate picture of why people remain in or leave the teaching profession.

The success of our project depends on maintaining contact with participants in the study over the long term. If you were involved in the FIT-Choice program but have lost touch with us, please email your name and contact details to <fitchoice@education.monash.edu>.

Further information on our research project is available at <www.fitchoice.org>.

Authors

Dr Paul Richardson and Associate Professor Helen Watt, Faculty of Education, Monash University, Melbourne

This shows that, across the different cultural settings, there is something 'core' and robust about teachers' work and characteristics. We also investigated factors which may deter people from a teaching career.

When commencing teacher education, participants tended to rate teaching as highly demanding but offering low rewards of salary and social status. They also stated others had tried to dissuade them from a teaching career.

It is worth emphasising these new teachers had still chosen teaching as their career – despite clearly recognising its high demand, low reward structures and social status.

It may seem obvious there would be different types of beginning teachers, although this has not previously been examined. We have identified three main types who have different career plans and goals. We call them the 'highly engaged persisters' (45%), 'highly engaged switchers' (27%), and 'lower engaged desisters' (28%).

Highly engaged persisters mostly intend to spend their entire career in teaching, and score highly in terms of their planned effort, personal development and leadership aspirations.

Highly engaged switchers are more likely to indicate future career goals other than teaching. Nevertheless, their scores for planned effort, personal development and leadership aspirations are similar to those of the highly engaged persisters.

Lower engaged desisters are the least likely to intend to persist with a career in teaching and have the lowest scores on the planned effort, personal development and leadership dimensions.

Teacher education and employing authorities need to take seriously the different planned career trajectories of people who come into their programs. They need to go beyond the assumption that a person coming into teacher education holds a traditional lifetime career model of job security founded on incremental age-related advancement and loyalty to the profession.

Greater attention needs to be paid to teachers' wellbeing so they do not suffer burnout, become disgruntled less effective teachers, or leave the profession.

Effective teaching is an intensely interpersonal profession, requiring complex social and cognitive skills – these are not typically the focus of teacher education programs, which emphasise curriculum content and pedagogical knowledge.

Schooling contributes significantly to the preparation of young people for citizenship, and quality teachers are fundamental to an education revolution. But for too long, teacher educators and policy makers have assumed we already know why people choose teaching, persist, or leave.

Our Factors Influencing Teaching Choice (FIT-Choice) research program is discovering previous assumptions are inadequate. It is identifying why people choose to become teachers today, their hopes and fears, what sustains or depletes them in the profession and what impacts on their psychological and physical wellbeing.

The FIT-Choice study is the first to track a large sample of beginning teachers across a number of countries over a long period of time, to address problems of recruitment and retention in the current climate of teacher shortages.

In Australia, we are following 1,653 beginning teachers since their entry to teacher education in Victoria and NSW in 2002/3. The teachers in our study include high-school leavers as well as those who made a career switch into teaching; we are following all of their trajectories, whether they remain in teaching or move onto other careers.

This is the first study to empirically measure the motivations of those who enter the teaching profession, their feelings of preparedness when they graduate from teacher education programs, their experiences in particular school settings, and levels of career satisfaction and wellbeing.

In general, the strongest motivations for teaching are:

- personal interest in teaching
- belief in one's teaching abilities
- having had previous positive teaching and learning experiences
- desire to make positive contributions to society through working with youth.

Personal quality of life goals were also important, although less so. Social influences were quite weak. And choosing teaching as a 'fallback' career was definitely not the case for new teachers today.

People's motivations to teach were remarkably similar across the different country samples we have examined so far – from Australia, the United States, Germany, and Norway. We had really expected more differences.

Study reveals beginning teachers have differing career plans

Australia is facing retention difficulties in the teaching profession which will increase staffing and financial burdens on the educational and wider community, according to Monash University researchers.

Dr Paul Richardson and Dr Helen Watt from Monash's Faculty of Education are documenting the experiences of early career teachers to establish their levels of personal wellbeing and professional engagement.

They hope their Australian Research Council funded project will provide valuable evidence to assist government and education policy makers in supporting early career teachers and reducing attrition from the profession.

In the following article Drs Richardson and Watt discuss their research and reveal some interesting findings about the different planned career trajectories of beginning teachers.

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Contact us:
Telephone: 1300 888 067
Fax: (03) 8601 5801
Email: vit@vit.vic.edu.au

Write:
PO Box 531
Collins Street West
Victoria 8007 Australia

Visit:
Level 24 Marland House
570 Bourke Street
Melbourne 3000

Website:
www.vit.vic.edu.au