

Project Update

We hope that this newsletter finds you well! Thank you again for participating in the FITChoice project. As you know, you have been engaged in helping us study why people choose teaching careers, and how they develop in the profession.

All of your time has been worth it. This is the only study in the world that has been able to obtain information from this number of beginning teachers, across several continents, and over this period of time. With "Phase 3" of the longitudinal study scheduled this month, thanks to you all, we will have Australian data spanning 5 years! This is providing an invaluable resource as we study why people choose a teaching career, and what supports and sustains them in the teaching profession.

You are one of more than 2000 participants from Australia, the U.S., the U.K., Germany and Norway. Participants' profiles include people:

- who enrolled in undergraduate and graduate-entry teacher education courses
- completed their teaching qualification or not

“Exhilarating, frustrating, energising, exhausting, inspiring, disheartening, mind-boggling, soul-stretching, heart-rending and deeply satisfying.”

- who are now teaching professionals, or for a variety of reasons are not
- with teachers from secondary, primary, early childhood, and other specialist settings
- who span a diverse range of ages
- and include a significant number who have switched from previous careers into teaching.

The practical and policy importance of this work cannot be understated. The FITChoice project is contributing to the debate in a range of current topical issues including the teacher shortage, work conditions, hard-to-staff schools, teacher effectiveness, and teacher well-being. You may have seen featured media articles or heard interviews we have done – or you can access many of them from the project website. This is one of the ways we can have a visible impact on community attitudes and policy and represent your voices regarding these issues.

We hope that you enjoy this newsletter and welcome your comments anytime. "Phase 3" of the project is happening now, as an online survey, and focuses on your experiences since teacher education.

Take us with you!

The ongoing success of this project depends on us being able to keep in touch with you. For this reason we have produced a fridge magnet so you can "take us with you" when you move. Please contact us if you move so we can keep in touch.



Dr Helen Watt & Dr Paul Richardson
FIT Choice Chief Investigators

The FIT-Choice project welcomes Zoe Morris, Educational & Developmental Psychologist, who joined the project in 2008. Zoe has particular interests in teacher professionalism, and supporting students with special learning needs.



Teacher Wellbeing

My work with the project is focussed on different school contexts in which teachers work. Not all schools are the same - and some schools have a more favourable set of circumstances to work within. This impacts their ability to promote positive outcomes. I am particularly interested in the psychological and physical well-being of beginning teachers like many of you. For example:

- Do your early teaching experiences influence your long term professional plans?

- How do teachers cope in difficult and challenging school environments?
- What levels of stress and other health issues do you experience from your work?
- What are the early signs of work burnout?
- What is the prevalence of stress, health issues and burnout compared to people who are not currently teaching?

From my investigations I will gain insight into themes in educational and psychological research -- especially how to best retain quality teachers within schools over the longer term, and what support strategies are

effective for the management of work-related stress and burnout.

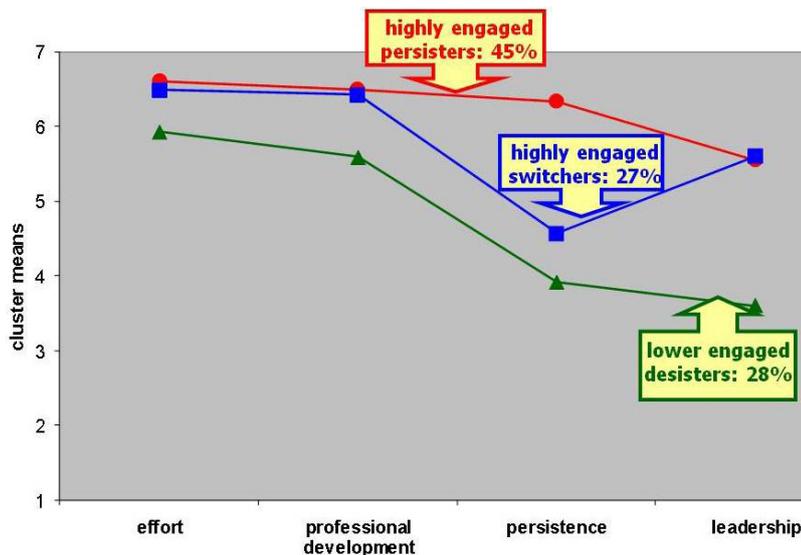


Kari Wilkins is a research assistant on the FIT-Choice project. She has a background in secondary teaching and educational and developmental psychology.

Are there different types of beginning teachers?

Teacher education and employing authorities need to take seriously the different planned career trajectories of pre-service teachers. We have identified 3 distinct “types” of beginning teachers in terms of their career engagement and professional development aspirations, as in the graph below. We call these types the “highly engaged persisters” (top line, 45% of sample), “highly engaged switchers” (middle line, 27%), and “lower engaged desisters” (lower line, 28%). Teaching as a career has been influenced

by the changing nature of work and shifts in assumptions about career structures, loyalty, and the psycho-social meaning of work. For beginning teachers, their different profiles of goals, commitments, plans, and aspirations will inevitably lead to different pathways of professional identity and development. Our findings invite re-examination of recruitment efforts, aspects of teacher education programs, and current models of career induction and mentoring.



“Are you kidding. I used to earn \$150,000 for a 9-5 job with 8 weeks holiday - and little true responsibility. Now I earn \$43,000 for a 50-60 hour a week job with 12 non-student weeks and the responsibility of helping 100 of our next generation have the best possible start in life.”

Teaching as a “fallback” career

One populist claim that appears in the media now and again, and in some poorly designed research, is the general statement

that teachers choose their career to have an easy life – that they are lazy and seeking a job with good holidays and a short working day. This is one myth we were pleased to “debunk” as reported in the newspaper release below:

THE AGE • MONDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2006
theage.com.au

Teaching’s good life simply a myth

THE popular belief that teachers are in the job for short working days and long holidays has been debunked by research.

Most people pursue a teaching career because they believe they are good at it, like the challenges of the job, or have an altruistic desire to help children.

“The public has got a view . . . that teaching is an easy job, it’s a nine-to-five job, you get lots and lots of holidays,” said researcher Paul Richardson.

“These aspects of teaching are no longer what really attract people at all. They are looking for intellectual challenge.”

Dr Richardson and Dr Helen Watt, of Monash University’s education faculty, canvassed 1600 teacher trainees who started at Monash and two Sydney universities in 2002 and 2003.

The findings, to be presented at a national education conference in Adelaide tomorrow, come at a time of teacher shortages across the country.

Dr Watt said recruitment drives should not focus on short work days or long holidays, as people pursuing the job for those reasons rarely stayed. Those who planned to work hard remained committed.
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REASONS FOR TEACHING

- Believe they have an ability.
- Enjoy the work, finding it intellectually challenging and rewarding.
- Have had positive experiences of teaching and learning.
- Want to shape the future.
- Want to improve social equity through education.
- Have a social conscience and want to make a contribution.
- Want to work with children and adolescents.

Research and Government Policy

Understanding the pressures on new teachers entering the profession has been a focus for governments around the world as well as in Australia, as they attempt to deal with issues of retention and quality accountability.

In Australia, a number of states established teacher registration bodies such as the Victorian Institute of Teaching, the NSW Institute of Teachers, and the Queensland College of Teachers. The V.I.T. was the first to require all teacher graduates to participate in a process designed to support beginning teachers in gaining their ‘Full Registration’, in which they are required to show evidence they meet eight professional standards. The supportive mentoring aspect of this program has generally proved to be very valuable, with many participants reporting positive effects on their professional learning. But there are still teachers who find these credentialing requirements to be additions to workload and a cause for stress.

Research projects which look at beginning teachers, mentoring and support programs, stress, and identity all have important implications for government policy development and implementation. In turn, these policies will have consequences for attracting and retaining quality teachers.



Emma Richardson has worked for VIT since 2005 and also works with the Department of Education and at Monash University on research and policy development around issues to do with early career teachers.

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