'I've decided to become a teacher': Influences on career change

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Abstract

The present study explored reasons behind graduates' decisions to pursue teaching as a career, in a 1-year pre-service teacher education program at an Australian university, located in Melbourne ($N = 74$). A survey collected data about respondents' reasons for choosing teaching as a career, with open-ended questions eliciting rich qualitative data to elaborate on rating-scale responses. Five factors relating to social status, career fit, prior considerations, financial reward and time for family were identified through factor analyses. Respondents' ratings were independent of previous level of qualification and having children or not, with little evidence for gender differences. Three distinct clusters of students showed that different combinations of reasons were relevant to each group's choice of teaching as a career, and these reasons were further illustrated and discussed in relation to qualitative data from open-ended survey questions.
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1. Introduction

Australia, like other English speaking countries, is facing a crisis of teacher recruitment, retention and morale. The teaching force in Australia, the UK, Europe and the USA is ageing at a time when new university graduates are not necessarily seeing teaching as a career priority (Darling-Hammond, 1988; Neave, 1992). With the number of school-aged children projected to remain stable over the next two decades and the teaching workforce in Australia being considerably older than the workforce as a whole (Hugo, 2001, p. 134), there is growing pressure to find ways of recruiting new teachers from outside the traditional pathways of high school leavers and to provide access to teacher education for those seeking to make a career change into teaching. In addition, aspirations to improve the quality and professionalism of the teaching force in Australia (e.g., Ramsey, 2000), Europe and North America have coincided with many teachers now being middle-aged and sustained by the hope that their retirement packages will allow them to take advantage of

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early retirement options (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 1990; Murnane, Singer, Willett, Kemple, & Olsen, 1991). How to replace the baby boom generation of teachers is increasingly of concern to many governments around the world, not least of all in Australia.

Teaching has long attracted substantial numbers of women. In Australia, women make up 'two-thirds of all teachers compared with 43.6 per cent of the total workforce' (Hugo, 2001, p. 134). The feminisation of teaching as a career in Australia has coincided with a public perception that teaching is low in status, not well paid and is essentially work more suited to women. Similarly, in the UK a study by Johnston, McKeown, and McEwen (1999) investigating the choice of primary teaching by males and females indicated that the males who chose primary teaching did so 'despite a number of negative factors towards males proposing to enter primary teaching' (p. 62). Teacher education institutions have difficulties attracting sufficient numbers of eligible males into primary school teacher education and as a consequence schools experience serious problems in recruiting male teachers and thus providing a gender balance of teachers working with children in primary classrooms.

The shortage of all suitably qualified and experienced teachers promises to worsen unless teaching as a career can be made attractive to new and older graduates (Serow & Forrest, 1994). Unfortunately, in Australia salaries and employment conditions continue to make teaching a less than attractive career option for the most gifted university graduates (DEST, 2003). On the other hand, Hanushek and Pace (1995) in the USA found that teacher salaries are not 'a particularly powerful influence on student choices' (p. 114), while a study by Joseph and Green (1986) showed that 'older respondents more often acknowledged material rewards for teaching' (p. 30). For those making a career change into teaching, a reliable if modest salary may well be an important consideration (Serow & Forrest, 1994, p. 556).

For some time State Ministries and Departments of Education in Australia have been advertising in an effort to attract professionals out of other careers into teaching. As well as temporarily reducing the acknowledged teacher shortages in each of the Australian States and Territories, these mature-aged teachers may contribute positively to changing the culture of schools. Authorities seeking to recruit career change graduates in Australia have to contend with the perception neatly identified by Crow, Levine, and Nager (1990) in the USA that 'leaving the business world for teaching is still viewed in this country as an implausible choice' (p. 197). These perceptions coupled with a systematic downsizing of the State education systems in some States in Australia during the 1990s, not surprisingly made teaching seem a less attractive career choice and resulted in reluctance on the part of many to venture into teaching. A decade later with shortages registering in most Australian States and Territories, the UK, USA and many European countries, something like a crisis had been created for teacher recruitment and retention, in a climate of flagging staff morale (Dinham, 1995).

Our study has arisen in response to the need to provide a profile of people who have decided to undertake a teacher education course as a career change into teaching. We identify those factors that prompted them to undertake teacher education by asking participants to indicate their reasons and motives for deciding on this career change.

We focused on two cohorts of students entering secondary teacher education studies in 2001 at a Melbourne university: one enrolled in the first year of a 2-year part-time Graduate Diploma of Education undertaken by distance education ($n = 119$), and a smaller cohort of mature-aged students from a mid-year intake into a 1-year full-time on-campus program ($n = 33$). Graduates entering these programs had gained their previous degree qualifications from institutions in Australia and overseas. The distance education program attracts students from all States and Territories, and three of the students were located in overseas countries. The course has been operating for approximately two decades and has each year attracted many more applicants than can be accommodated in the program.

Many students concurrently work in other occupations while completing the course. These students juggle employment and part-time study as they prepare themselves to qualify as teachers. The program regularly attracts applicants who are qualified professionals in various fields (e.g., practising solicitors, accountants, veterinarians, medical doctors, petroleum engineers, designers, as well as a host of other occupations, including women who are seeking to return to work after interrupting their previous career to have children. Since community attitudes to teachers and teaching tend to preclude it from being seen as a high status and high salary career (see Crow et al., 1990; Cooper-Shaw, 1996; Farkas, Johnson, & Faleno, 2000; Gordon, 2000; Hanushek & Pace, 1995), it is therefore of interest to ask why people who currently occupy other careers (including law, scientific research, business, engineering and medicine) would want to swap them for a career in teaching?

2. Method

2.1. Design

Two components comprised the study. The first component was an extensive survey phase in order to identify patterns across the full sample, using a combination of closed-ended rating-scale items and open-ended questions designed to elicit richer qualitative data. As a result of this first phase, respondents with specific characteristics were targeted for a follow-up interview phase. Interviews provided more detail and depth of information in relation to respondents' reasons for choosing teaching as a career.

2.2. Participants and procedures

The survey was mailed mid-year together with a self-addressed return envelope to all students enrolled in the first year of the program. The distribution of the survey was timed to coincide with the end of the first teaching practicum, although a second follow-up mail-out was conducted 3 weeks later in efforts to increase response

rates. This was done to ensure that the cohort of teacher education students had very recent experiences in secondary schools, as it was hoped that this experience would test the decision to take on teacher education, either confirming or disconfirming that decision. The survey was distributed to 152 (114 females and 38 males) candidates for a Graduate Diploma in Secondary Education at a Melbourne University. All respondents held previous degree qualifications.

Seventy-four surveys were completed and returned by 63 females and 11 males, representing a 49% return rate (55% of females and 29% of males). Surveys were received and coded by an employed research assistant in order to protect respondents' anonymity as an ethical safeguard, since one of the researchers was responsible for the design, teaching and assessment of some subjects in the Graduate Diploma in Education course in which respondents were enrolled. As part of the survey, participants were asked to provide their name and telephone number if they were willing to take part in a further open-ended telephone interview.

2.3. The survey

The survey instrument was devised and piloted with a small group of academics involved in the program. The instrument sought to collect:

- biographical and demographic data about the students (age category, gender, qualifications, number of children, past and present occupations),
- attitudinal data towards agreement or disagreement with a number of propositions (covering issues such as career satisfaction, salary, social standing, and the demands of teaching), and
- qualitative data through open-ended questions on the timing of and influences on their decision to become a teacher.

The survey consisted first, of 20 items assessing the extent to which respondents agreed with statements related to their choice of teaching as a career. Strength of agreement was measured on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly

disagree), through 2 (disagree), 3 (unsure), 4 (agree) and 5 (strongly agree). These 20 items are represented in Table 1. The items were developed through brainstorming ideas of academics who had an interest in candidates' reasons for entering the program.

Subsequent survey questions asked about respondent sex, number of children, age group (20–29, 30–39, 40–49, 50+ years), and highest level of qualification held (Technical and Further

Table 1
Survey items assessing reasons for respondents' choice of teaching

Item	Item stem[a]
1	I was dissatisfied with my previous career
2	I expect teaching to provide me with a better career path
3	Teaching will enable me to contribute more effectively to the economic wellbeing of my family
4	I believe I will be able to make a greater contribution to society as a teacher
5	I expect teaching to be a satisfying occupation
6	I have experience of adolescents and I expect to enjoy working with them
7	I am not experienced with adolescents but I expect to enjoy working with adolescents
8	My family is supportive of my decision to become a teacher
9	I have thought very carefully about becoming a teacher
10	I have always wanted to be a teacher
11	I believe that a teaching qualification will enable me to teach in overseas countries
12	I am certain I will take up secondary school teaching as a career
13	Becoming a teacher will enhance my social status
14	Becoming a teacher will enhance my level of respect in the community
15	I expect teaching to be a psychologically & emotionally demanding occupation
16	I believe teaching will require of me a greater range of social skills than required for my present/previous occupation
17	Teaching is an occupation that offers a good salary
18	Teaching as a career will allow me more family time
19	Teaching is an occupation that will allow me to have a more fulfilling life
20	I already possess the necessary knowledge & understanding of my discipline to meet the demands of teaching at secondary school level

[a]*Note*: Response options for all 20 items were from 1 (strongly disagree), through 2 (disagree), 3 (unsure), 4 (agree) and 5 (strongly agree).

Education [TAFE], Bachelor degree, Bachelor degree with Honours, Masters degree, Ph.D., or other). The remaining questions 25–33 were open-ended, exploring respondents' current occupation, previous occupations, time when they decided they wanted to become a teacher, most influential factors in their decision to pursue a teaching career, most influential factors in their decision to leave their current occupation, whether an off-campus distance education program was their only option for undertaking teacher education and why, whether this program was a way of enhancing their professional skills in order to work in adult education, whether they had had positive experiences as learners at school, and what might cause them to abandon teaching as a career once they became teachers. These open-ended questions are summarised in Table 2.

2.4. Analyses

Exploratory factor analysis was used to examine the factorial structure of the survey items which assessed the 74 participants' reasons for electing teaching as a career. Item 12 ('I am certain I will take up secondary school teaching as a career') was not included in factor analyses, since this did not represent a reason for selecting teaching as a

Table 2
Open-ended survey items

Item	Item
25	What is your current occupation?
26	What other occupations/careers have you pursued?
27	When did you decide that you wanted to become a teacher?
28	What most influenced your decision to pursue a teaching career?
29	What has been most influential in your decision to leave your current occupation/career?
30	Was enrolling in an off-campus distance education program your only option for undertaking a teacher education program?
31	Do you want to work in adult education and is this program a way of enhancing your professional skills?
32	Did you have positive experiences as a learner at school?
33	Should you become a teacher what might cause you to abandon teaching as a career?

career. Item 7 ('I am not experienced with adolescents but I expect to enjoy working with adolescents') was also discarded due to its dependency on item 6 ('I have experience of adolescents and I expect to enjoy working with them'). With the exclusion of items 12 and 7, the remaining items 1–20 were subjected to exploratory factor analysis using image factoring and oblimin rotation. Cronbach alpha reliabilities subsequently measured the internal consistency of derived factors.

MANOVA tested for differences on the dependent set of derived factors according to respondent sex, having children or not and highest level of qualification, as well as possible interactions among these. In order to determine whether certain 'types' of respondents were identifiable in terms of their ratings on derived factors, an hierarchical cluster analysis was performed. Using cluster membership as an independent variable, a subsequent MANOVA was performed on the dependent set of derived factors from the EFA, in order to assess profiles of identified clusters of respondents. Subsequent to identification of profiles for each cluster, qualitative data from the open-ended survey questions were used to further explore and illustrate patterns for each cluster group.

3. Results

3.1. What factors are relevant to choosing teaching as a career?

An initial exploratory factor analysis of the 18 items produced a seven-factor solution, explaining 71.41% of the variance, applying the criterion of eigenvalues being greater than unity. Five of these factors related to: *personal and social status* from teaching (items 13, 14, 16 and 2), *career fit* of teaching with individual goals (items 6, 15 and 4), *time for family* (item 18), *prior considerations* in terms of carefulness in making the decision to teach and family support for this decision (items 8 and 9), and *financial reward* (items 3 and 17). The remaining two factors were less easily interpretable, one containing items 5, 10 and 11, and the other containing items 1, 19 and 20. The pattern matrix for the seven-factor solution is shown in Table 3.

Cronbach α reliabilities were calculated for each derived factor, with αs of .76 for *personal and social status*, .63 for *career fit*, .60 for *prior considerations*, .59 for *financial reward*, while no internal consistency could be calculated for the single-item *time for family* subscale. The remaining two factors had αs of .49 (items 5, 10 and 11) and .44 (items 1, 19 and 20). These last two factors were discarded from further analyses on the bases of problematic interpretability, poor internal consistency, and low face validity. With respect to face validity, inspection of the wording of these items revealed item 10 did not target any reason for choosing teaching, item 11 was not framed in terms of whether participants had any desire to teach overseas, item 19 was overly general and item 20 contained complex and double-barrelled wording. Items 2 and 16 were also removed from the personal and social status factor, in order to enhance reliability, which increased to .94 following deletion of these items. This improved reliability is likely to be due to item 16 not targeting

Table 3
Pattern matrix for seven-factor solution for survey items assessing reasons for respondents' choice of teaching

Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6	Factor 7
13	**.84**	−.01	.00	.00	−.01	.12	.00
14	**.80**	.00	.00	.00	−.01	.14	.00
16	**.38**	.18	.20	.00	.01	−.01	−.12
2	**.36**	.21	−.25	−.21	.11	.26	.11
6	−.11	**.51**	−.11	.00	−.19	.13	.00
15	.01	**.47**	.17	.00	.12	−.01	.00
4	.23	**.43**	−.14	−.01	.00	−.01	−.22
18	.01	.00	**.49**	.00	.00	.00	.00
8	.00	-.01	.00	**−.53**	.01	.00	.00
9	.01	.01	.00	**−.52**	−.10	.00	.00
11	.00	.01	−.14	.00	**−.43**	.00	.00
10	.00	−.01	.01	.00	**−.41**	−.01	.01
5	.19	.32	−.01	.00	**−.36**	.14	−.18
3	.00	.00	−.13	.00	.11	**.49**	.01
17	.01	.00	.01	.00	.00	**.45**	−.01
19	.01	.17	.11	−.01	−.22	.20	**−.32**
1	.01	.00	−.01	.00	.00	.00	**−.32**
20	−.01	.00	.14	−.01	.00	.00	**−.26**

any reason for choosing teaching and item 2 being the only other item in the scale assessing personal benefits. Following removal of items 2 and 16, the *personal and social status* factor was renamed *social status*.

A second factor analysis was conducted on this reduced set of 10 items, yielding the expected five factors of: *social status*, *career fit*, *prior considerations*, *financial reward and time for family*. These five factors together explained 78.5% of the variance, with no cross-loadings of items evident across factors. The pattern matrix for this five-factor solution is shown in Table 4. Table 5 summarises items contained in each of the five factors, Cronbach α measures of internal consistency for each subscale, as well as subscale means and standard deviations.

Mean scores were above the scale midpoint for all factors excepting *social status*. Mean scores

greater than 4 were obtained for both *prior considerations* and *career fit*, while mean scores were greater than 3 for both *time for family* and *financial reward*. On the basis of the magnitude of mean subscale scores, it appears that *prior considerations*, *career fit*, *time for family* and *financial reward* were the most important factors in participants' selection of teaching as a career. *Social status* appeared to be a less important factor in choosing teaching as a career, across the sample as a whole.

Our five educed factors relate to previous research into teaching as a career choice, and career choices more generally. The importance of prior considerations in our sample parallels findings from a study at Michigan State University conducted by Book, Freeman, and Brousseau (1985) in which they indicate that those students who were not enrolled in teaching were more likely to find themselves in programs unrelated to their initial career choice. That is, teacher education students had more carefully considered their career choice (p. 29). Rather than being a 'second-choice' career teaching may well be becoming a career of choice for those who pursue it (see Watt & Richardson, in review).

The importance of our 'career fit' factor is supported in other research in the vocational literature, where Holland (1997) initially defined the notion of 'congruence' as the match between the individual and his/her work environment, and others have since demonstrated this congruence to be associated with career satisfaction (see Elton & Smart, 1998; Fricko & Beehr, 1992; Smart, Elton, & McLaughlin, 1986). In relation to teaching, Lortie (1975) identified the dynamics and the consequences of a disjuncture that may arise when the reality of the teacher's job and the perceived nature of the teacher's role is fashioned only from the vantage point of having been a student. As Serow, Eaker, and Ciechalski (1992, p. 141) observed: 'a strong sense of calling or service must be balanced by a willingness to confront the institutional realities with which public school teachers work, including massive bureaucratisation, inconsistent support from parents, and frequent indifference on the part of students.'

Table 4
Pattern matrix for five-factor solution for survey items assessing reasons for respondents' choice of teaching

Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5
13	**.86**	.00	.00	.00	.00
14	**.81**	.00	.00	.01	.00
6	−.01	**.44**	.00	.01	−.01
4	.29	**.43**	−.01	.00	−.01
15	.01	**.41**	.01	.00	.16
9	.01	.14	**−.41**	.00	.00
8	.00	−.01	**−.41**	.00	.00
17	.00	.00	.00	**.42**	.01
3	.00	.00	.00	**.40**	−.11
18	.00	.01	.00	.00	**.32**

Table 5
Means, standard deviations and measures of internal consistency for derived factors assessing reasons for choosing teaching

Factor	Items	α	Mean	SD
Social status	13, 14	.94	2.66	.92
Career fit	4, 6, 15	.63	4.01	.62
Prior considerations	8, 9	.60	4.45	.53
Financial reward	3, 17	.59	3.17	.93
Time for family	18	N/A	3.43	.97

Quality of life ('Time for family'), job security and salary or lack of it ('financial reward') are also factors which have previously been identified as influential in people's decision to undertake teaching careers (Brown, 1992; Chui Seng Yong, 1995; Shaw, 1996; Young, 1995). 'Social status' was not surprisingly rated low across the sample as a whole, given recent reports addressing the status of the teaching profession (Ramsey, 2000). Social status and financial reward are enduring issues. A decade earlier in writing of the situation in the USA, Crow et al. (1990) observed that 'the low earning power and status of teachers still deter many who might otherwise be attracted to the profession' (p. 197).

3.2. Do gender, children, or highest qualification influence motivations for teaching?

In order to explore whether the relevance of different factors might differ across certain subgroups, a MANOVA was conducted on the dependent variables of *social status*, *career fit*, *prior considerations*, *financial reward* and *time for family*. Independent variables included gender, having children or not, highest level of qualification (undergraduate or postgraduate, since no participants held a TAFE qualification as their highest qualification), as well as possible interactions among this set of independent variables. The only effect to achieve statistical significance ($p < .05$) was a univariate effect of gender on *prior considerations* ($F(1, 66) = 5.12$, $p = .027$), where means for males were significantly higher than for females (male $M = 4.77$ $SD = .34$, female $M = 4.40$ $SD = .54$). This effect may relate to the predominance of females in the course (62 females compared with 11 males), whereby it is less common for males to enrol, such that males that do elect to pursue a teaching career in this program have consequently thought carefully through their choice. No other statistically significant effects were identified in the MANOVA, implying that responses were not influenced by gender, having children or not and highest level of qualification obtained.

3.3. Are there typologies of people choosing teaching?

Determine whether factor scores would yield identifiable 'types' of participants, a cluster analysis was conducted, and MANOVA subsequently tested the statistical significance of cluster group differences. Post hoc tests using Tukey's HSD were computed to locate significant differences between cluster pairs. Hierarchical cluster analysis was performed using Ward's method, which minimises within-cluster variance, suggesting the existence of three clusters (*n*'s of 35, 26 and 12).

Fig. 1 depicts cluster means for each of the five derived factors related to participants' choice of teaching as a career. There was a multivariate effect of cluster overall (Pillai's Trace $= 1.28$, $F(10, 134) = 23.39$, $p < .001$), as well as univariate effects of cluster on each of the *social status* ($F(2, 70) = 22.69$, $p < .001$), *prior considerations* ($F(2, 70) = 3.22$, $p = .046$), *financial reward* ($F(2, 70) = 29.34$, $p < .001$) and *time for family* ($F(2, 70) = 30.49$, $p < .001$) factors. Post hoc tests using Tukey's HSD showed cluster differences on each of these four factors to be accounted for by cluster 2 being significantly higher than each of clusters 1 and 3 on *social status* ($p < .001$ in each case), cluster 2 being significantly higher than cluster 3 on *prior considerations* ($p = .043$), cluster 3 being significantly lower than each of clusters 1 and 2 on *financial reward* ($p < .001$ in each case), and cluster 1 being significantly lower than each of clusters 2 and 3 on *time for family* ($p < .001$ in each case). No effects of cluster membership were identifiable for the *career fit* factor ($F(2, 70) = 1.22$, $p = .30$), with the three clusters having similar ratings.

Cluster 1 was therefore characterised, relative to the other two clusters, by being low on *time for family* and *social status*, middling on *prior considerations* and high on the *financial reward* factor. Cluster 2 was high relative to the other clusters across all four *social status*, *prior considerations*, *financial reward*, and *time for family* factors. Cluster 3 scored low on the *social status*, *prior considerations*, and especially the *financial reward* factors, but high on *time for family*. Interestingly, there were no significant differences
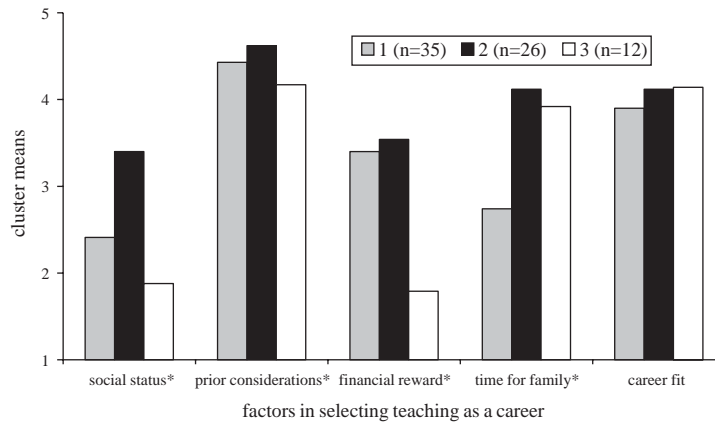
Fig. 1. Cluster profiles across factors in selecting teaching as a career. *Note*: *denotes factors on which there were statistically significant cluster differences.

between the three clusters in terms of either age group ($F(2, 70) = .77$, $p = .47$) or number of children ($F(2, 70) = .19$, $p = .82$), implying sources other than age and children led to these combinations of factors relevant to choosing teaching as a career. The purpose of the follow-up interviews was to ascertain what such sources might be.

3.4. Narrative accounts from each cluster

Both predictable and unexpected outcomes were thrown up by this study. The factors that influenced career change and an accompanying decision to enter teaching were intriguingly complex. Some factors were personal and related to immediate family circumstances, while others were more global and concerned employment stability and quality of life issues. This section interprets findings from the quantitative phase alongside open-ended comments from the survey and the interviews.

Qualitative comments from open-ended questions in the survey and interviews with selected participants asked participants two major questions: when they had decided to pursue teaching as a career? and what had most influenced that decision? On the question of timing there was considerable similarity across the three clusters, with clusters differentiated by the influences on their decision to become teachers, rather than on

the timing of that decision. In each of the clusters there were individuals who could be quite specific about the timing of their decision:

Dec 1999. Aspiration. Internal knowledge that it is my destiny. My contribution in life. (ID 20, Female, Cluster 1)

After the birth of 3rd child. (ID 41, Female, Cluster 2)

2 years ago. (ID 64, Male, Cluster 3)

Mid 2000, after the birth of my daughter as I was looking at returning to work. (ID 74, Female, Cluster 3)

By contrast, others indicated that they had an enduring interest in teaching as a career, and that they were realising a long-held aspiration, even though for some, the actual decision to activate their interest by enrolling in a teacher education program was not arrived at easily:

I have always wanted to teach/train. I completed my original BA at the beginning of the previous government when teaching numbers were being reduced. (ID 1, Female, Cluster 1)

For the last 15 years I've intended to get teaching qualifications. (ID 33, Male, Cluster 1)

When I was a child, I wanted to be a teacher. Life got in the way and now I am doing what I

dreamed of all those years ago. (ID 26, Female, Cluster 2)

When I was younger—I always wanted to be a schoolteacher but it was not economically viable in New York when I was choosing my career path and educational facility & program. (ID 40, Female, Cluster 3)

Always wanted to. Decided to do something about it 2 years ago. (ID 34, Male, Cluster 3)

For some of the female participants, who had entered the program following the birth of a child, teaching represented a chance to accommodate a change in life circumstances and to provide a change of career. For others, it was a matter of finding a more interesting and suitable career and being able to do something worthwhile:

After my second child started full time schooling I got an offer to teach German at Primary School & IT tutoring. I enjoy both students as I have students between 7 & 77. Decided to become a qualified teacher. (ID 7, Female, Cluster 1)

First considered in 1998. Final years of Bachelor degrees. Finally decided after dissatisfaction with chosen career. (ID 57, Male, Cluster 2)

In back of mind for couple of years. Own children are adolescent. Have taken interest in education at that level. (ID 36, Female, Cluster 3)

Clusters were differentiated on the basis of individuals' reasons for making the career change into teaching. Themes from qualitative interview accounts are elaborated in the following three sections for individuals from each of the three clusters, which corroborate and extend the profiles identified for each cluster from analysis of quantitative survey data.

3.5. Cluster 1 accounts

Cluster 1 was the largest cluster ($n = 35$). Of the 29 females represented in this cluster, nine were in the 20–29 year age group, 11 in the 30–39 year age bracket, eight in the 40–49 age-range and one in the 50+ category. Of the six males, four were 30–39 and two were 40–49. Relative to the other two clusters, this group was characterised by being low on time for family and social status, middling on prior considerations and high on the financial reward factor. Responses from this cluster to the open-ended interview questions about why they had chosen a career change into teaching highlighted the theme of desiring job security because previous work had been part-time, contract and/or irregular. Comments from the questionnaire on the issue of security include:

There now appears to be more support and recognition of teachers and greater financial incentive. The government and community appear to respect the role of teachers. I feel it will be a valuable and rewarding occupation with a number of benefits, e.g., strong employment, both nationally and overseas. (ID 28, Female)

The ability to develop a more sustainable career in outdoor education in terms of earning a better (although still a low wage) income, secure work and plenty of jobs around. (ID 5, Male)

Looking towards full-time employment again—a return to previous insurance industry would mean return to city. Involvement with school and children in sport. Seemed to spend much time being a volunteer 'teacher'. Stability and employment opportunities. (ID 12, Female)

I wanted the option of a job which promised a regular income, rather than having to always rely on freelance work. (ID 15, Female)

The nature of the work is mainly contract based and offers little job security. I rather hope that teaching will provide me greater job security. Also having assisted youngsters in re-entering study, I feel I can assist and work well in motivating young people. (ID 73, Female)

For some people in this cluster there was a disjuncture between the occupations they were currently pursuing and the occupations they had had in the past. While a woman may have indicated that she was currently a mother undertaking home duties, she may well have previously

been a civil engineer running her own computer business, a payroll processor, an insurance broker, a lawyer, a writer, or a police officer. Indeed, those who listed themselves as caring for their families and children also signalled that they were looking for a career to accommodate those commitments. Regardless of gender, people in this cluster were seeking a career with security, regularity of income, better hours of work and greater flexibility. What is more, this cluster along with Cluster 2 rated career and financial reward as having the most bearing on their decision to enter teaching. This is similar to findings from a study by Serow and Forrest (1994), income reliability and security were more important than a high salary. On the whole, this group did not relish their previous careers which were often characterised as insecure, boring, poorly paid and inflexible with regard to looking after children, particularly during school holiday times. An opportunity to have a career where the work was interesting, without the necessity for long hours, allowing for full-time and part-time involvement and providing a reasonable income, was an attractive aspect of teaching for this group. The abundance of available teaching positions and the security of the income were influential in orienting this group to seek teaching as a career pathway. Paul (ID 67) neatly picked up on some of these themes:

> I think, primarily the opportunity to engage with young people and to have a positive effect on people's lives. But probably also secondly in a career sense I think it offers opportunities for a fairly stable ongoing career and a career that I see as fairly constructive in terms of what you're involved in doing in that if you're successful as a teacher I see that you have a fairly constructive role in society.

He also emphasised the constructive role that teaching can have in creating a better society, motives identified by other researchers (see Brown, 1992; Huberman, 1993; Huberman & Grounauer, 1993; Kyriacou & Coulthard, 2000; Montecinos & Nielsen, 1997). Such a view is consistent with high ratings on 'career fit' across all three clusters.

3.6. Cluster 2 accounts

Cluster 2 was high relative to the other clusters across all four factors of social status, prior considerations, financial reward, and time for family. There were 23 females in this cluster (six aged 20–29, 13 aged 30–39, three aged 40–49 and one aged 50+) and just three males (two aged 20–29 and one in the 40–49 age bracket). These people had thought carefully about taking up teaching and were hoping that they would be able to make a difference for children and adolescents, but they were also conscious that the income derived from teaching would contribute to a better quality of life for themselves and their families.

In answer to the question 'what most influenced your decision to pursue a teaching career?' all four factors were nominated by this group as being influential in relation to their motives and aspirations, for example:

> To be able to support myself and daughter (especially through her tertiary years) and to provide income for other artistic pursuits, to be independent WHILE doing a creatively challenging, socially (looks like engaging) job. I have always had a particular interest in the highly formative years of 13–16 years of age. (ID 19, Female)

> My secondary school teachers. I like working with adolescents through my swimming coaching position and my current occupation. The opportunities to have quality time with family. The most influential reason to change careers to teaching is the opportunities to have more quality time with family. (ID 21, Female)

> Being able to impart knowledge and being good with people (in general). The good hours and the pay are influences. The need to share my expertise and skills on a broader scale. (ID 26, Female)

> Living in the country. Teaching offers the potential for a secure occupation. Suitable to having a young family. Relief teaching offers part-time flexibility. (ID 39, Female)

They were looking for employment that was more accommodating of their family commitments but they were acutely aware that they were operating in a job market where firms have been down-sizing so that security and stability of employment are of pressing interest. While these people wanted to make a contribution to society they also wanted to be challenged by the work they were taking on. Samples of the voices from this cluster indicate that the ability to work part-time and to fit work around family was significant. For those living in rural areas teaching offered security of employment with a reasonable income at a time when jobs are difficult to find, particularly for tertiary educated women. This group was also concerned to be in employment where the work required them to work with adolescents, because they believed they could make a difference to their lives and influence the direction society was going:

My need for a challenge, something I can really commit to and through which I can contribute to society as a whole. (ID 9, Female)

Teaching, although difficult and stressful at times is easier to juggle with a family than other jobs. It is also a field where demand is quite high—so it's more likely for me to find a job if we move again. Basically—the profession is more suited to my employment needs. (ID 32, Female)

Experience with youth work. Desire to live in areas of Australia with decent employment: income and job satisfaction. (ID 57, Male)

Elizabeth (ID 19), a 44 year old woman who had raised her 17-year old daughter on her own indicated, in the extended comment section of the survey, that it was important for her to be able to support herself and her daughter, especially as her daughter was about to move into higher education. Further, in an extended interview she indicated that her prior positive experiences of teaching art to adults had confirmed her belief that teaching was for her 'a kind of natural thing to go towards'. Moreover, Elizabeth was attracted to teaching because she felt she could make a difference in the lives of adolescents:

Well, I do actually find the idea of particularly that age group, sort of 14 to 16 or so, a fascinating age group because they haven't quite solidified, as you know, rigid human beings yet. And they're still formative and yeah, that's what's interesting about it to me—is that there's a lot that you can, a lot of creative stuff that you can get into with them and they'll be responsive and rise to it.

A little further on in the same interview she revealed the nature and degree of the impact she hoped to make with these young people:

I would like to think that contact with me would sort of broaden their sense of their own … or broaden—you know deepen their confidence in their own thinking and make them more curious about the world and that kind of thing.

Similarly, Kate (ID 39) neatly articulated a number of the 'themes' that characterised those who belonged to cluster 2. Kate wanted to be able to make a contribution to the family income, but only if the hours of employment allowed her to attend to her young family. Hence her desire for what she identified as 'flexibility'. Here Kate was explaining to the interviewer the circumstances, influences and motives impinging on her decision:

… I live in the country with my husband and my 18-month old daughter and I have a Master of Science in Environmental Management. So I was familiar with Post Graduate study and in the country I think probably the best work for a female mum—or I suppose all mums are female—is teaching or nursing. It's nice and flexible, you can get some relief work—you can make a bit of money.

… I think the hours being 9 a.m.–3 p.m. or 9 a.m.–3.30 p.m. with kids are attractive. The holidays are attractive because they're obviously when your kids have got holidays and I suppose the flexibility of being able to do some sort of relief work and without necessarily being a full-time person, or being able to do a term here or a term there.

3.7. Cluster 3 accounts

Cluster 3 represented the smallest number of people ($n = 12$) of each of the three clusters and consisted of nine females and three males. The age profile for the cluster indicated that 8 of the females were in the age groups below 39 (four in 20–29 years and four in the 30–39 years) with only one in the 40–49 years age bracket. Of the three males, two were in the 30–39 years age group and one in the 40–49 years age bracket. This cluster scored low on the social status, prior considerations, and especially the financial reward factors, but high on time for family.

Individuals in cluster 3 were seeking to expand their career options and to be engaged in a more satisfying career. Members of this cluster were quite different from clusters 1 and 2 in that the financial rewards from teaching were of low priority to them. These people had already had professional careers as managers, linguist/reporter, meteorologist, chartered accountant, corporate trainer, development metallurgist, project officer/researcher, medical doctor, public relations administrator, and therefore possessed a range of skills and abilities that may well be reactivated if teaching did not prove satisfactory for them. They had had professional careers and were now less than attracted to jobs that provided a high income, but a depleted quality of family life due to the working hours demanded. While not all participants indicated dissatisfaction with their previous career, there was a desire on the part of most to seek greater satisfaction from their career and more importantly, a better quality of life for themselves with their families:

Self happiness. Ability to work close to home. (ID 34, Male)

Lifestyle, professional satisfaction. (ID 45, Male)

Dissatisfied with work. Kept wondering if I wouldn't have preferred to be a teacher. (ID 55, Female)

One of the participants (ID 27, Female) summed up the matrix of previous experiences and motives that influenced her decision; these were similar to others in the cluster. This participant pointed to a need for her working hours to suit her family's requirements as well as an opportunity to provide educational support for her children and to find employment close to home:

Opportunity of local employment. Better hours for family life. Ability to better aid my children in their education. Wanted something I could balance well with my young family now but that I could be fulfilled with even when they no longer need me so much.

This response needs to be placed in the context of her previous employment, her husband's current employment and the needs of her three children. Thus her answer to the question, 'What has been most influential in your decision to leave your current occupation/career?' identifies how her life as a parent was influencing her motives and aspirations to become a teacher. Her previous career as a chartered accountant and a redundancy package from that employment had meant that she could fulfil her roles as a parent and a partner while looking pragmatically upon teaching as a fulfilling career. Her answer was pointedly succinct with regard to why she wanted to make a change:

Constant long hours—3 children in creche 12 hours/day. Husband has long hours too so I needed to be primary carer. Once in a lifetime voluntary redundancy package offer meant I could study for 2 years and remain without financially disadvantaging the family.

Julie (ID 23), who was interviewed following the survey phase of the study, cogently articulated a commonality of interests among people in this group when she indicated that she '*developed a bit of a passion for young people*' and that she wanted to work with them more directly. Julie needed to spend time with her family because she had a small baby but she had a desire to work part-time or in a role that was suitable to her domestic situation. As with the others in this cluster, Julie had been successful in another career and now saw teaching as '*another career option*' she would pursue, but not necessarily for the rest of her working life:

… My previous position was with a welfare agency. My role was primarily in marketing and fundraising and that sort of thing. But I was in contact with the Youth Workers quite a lot through my position. And I developed a bit of a passion for young people and realised that I wanted to be in a more direct service type of work. So a good way to start into that field was through teaching, I thought. And so yeah, that's why I primarily took on the teaching as another career option … I guess the importance of teaching. I see that over the years I guess that teachers are a bit undervalued. And I think it's such an important role in terms of the fact that teachers are one of the only stability that is offered to young people as they're going into the workforce, given the changes with family and that sort of thing over the years. So I think that teaching is a very important position and I hope to have some … be able to, you know guide young people in a positive way in the future, yeah. So that's the other reason.

The females in the cluster were typically raising children so that the quality of family life issues were influential in encouraging them to leave one career and were instrumental in their decision to undertake teacher education and seek a career in teaching. The males in the cluster, like their female counterparts, were concerned to realise better lifestyle options by working close to home in a more satisfying career. Unlike those in cluster 1, financial rewards from teaching were not a high priority with this group simply because they were more concerned with family and the quality of life of their families.

3.8. What are the implications for teacher recruitment?

The bias of six to one of females to males foregrounds the question of why fewer males are looking to teaching as a career pathway. While our survey was asking why participants were going into teaching, it would be equally important in future research to be asking why people are *not* going into teaching. Concerns have been voiced regarding the gender imbalance in the teaching profession, particularly in view of creating more 'balanced' education for school students, especially for boys at the elementary level (Ramsey, 2000; Gabriel & Smithson, 1990; Kimmel & Messner, 1995; McCormick, 1994).

Family circumstances and responsibilities play an important role in the pull into teaching as a career change for many respondents, just as security of employment did for others. Given that there were six times the number of females enrolled in the program of teacher education than there were males and that the sample of respondents also reflected this bias (63 females and 11 males), it may not seem surprising that women were wanting to find careers that allowed time to have a quality family life with reasonable hours (see for example 'Kate' p. 21) and to trade off higher salaries for security of income. Interestingly, however, gender was not an issue; with males in this particular cohort similarly motivated by security of employment, family and quality of life issues as females. The small number of males in our sample causes us to be cautious with this conclusion, and future research with more representative samples should further pursue gendered motivations related to the career change into teaching.

There was a strong consensus that teaching would provide a satisfying career. Respondents indicated that they were more than aware that teaching would be psychologically and socially demanding. However, prior positive experiences with training/instructing roles and positive experiences with adolescents/young people encouraged respondents' feelings that teaching would be a career that 'fit' their skill set, interests and future goals. On the other hand, we were struck by the diversity and versatility of occupational backgrounds and previous career experiences our respondents brought with them into teacher education and their future teaching careers. These graduates will take with them into schools a range of skills, experiences, abilities, interests and attitudes that can only enhance the quality and effectiveness of secondary schooling.

Although the study has thrown up a number of indicators that we believe will sustain further

research attention, the response rate for surveys in this study makes us cautious in our claims. Fifty-four percent of females and 32% of males returned surveys for analysis, which raises questions about whether certain types of people chose not to respond, particularly for males. We would therefore restrain a tendency to make generalisations from this sample of mature-aged people in one university teacher education program. However, we believe that the more we understand the influences, motives and aspirations of late entry teachers with their rich diversity of backgrounds and experiences, the more likely we will be able to recruit them into teaching and retain them in the profession. These findings should be relevant for policy-makers in informing recruitment efforts to attract career change entrants into teaching. Late entry teachers into teacher education who make the transition into a teaching career have the potential to enrich and diversify the profession by bringing their wealth of experience from other occupations into schools and classrooms.

The study has provided an interesting profile of the influences, talents, abilities, interests, motives and aspirations of a group of people who have decided to become teachers after pursuing a range of other careers and occupations. Their decision to enrol in a teacher education program has been made at a time when the mass media and the general public continue to see teaching as a lower priority career choice. Our results show three distinct clusters of students with different profiles across the factors identified from the survey questions, highlighting that different and subtle combinations of factors are relevant to choosing teaching as a career for each of these groups. Interpretation of open-ended responses in conjunction with the survey data provide a richer understanding of the motives, emphases, influences and aspirations of graduate trainee teachers from within each of the three cluster groups. Further research and the development of the *FIT-Choice* Scale (see Watt & Richardson, 2003a,b, in review) will permit us to investigate further those factors relevant to attracting different 'types' of people, with richly different life trajectories, into teaching as a career.

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