

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 underway in the U.S. and Australia, we now have 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 Bachelor 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, elementary, 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 can access featured media articles and interviews we have done 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, whether you are teaching or not.



Dr Helen Watt & Dr Paul Richardson
FIT Choice Chief Investigators



Lauren Musu is our contact for participants in the United States, working in the School of Education at the University of Michigan. If you would like to speak to someone in the U.S. about the project:

Tel: 734-763-1386

Email: lmusu@umich.edu

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.

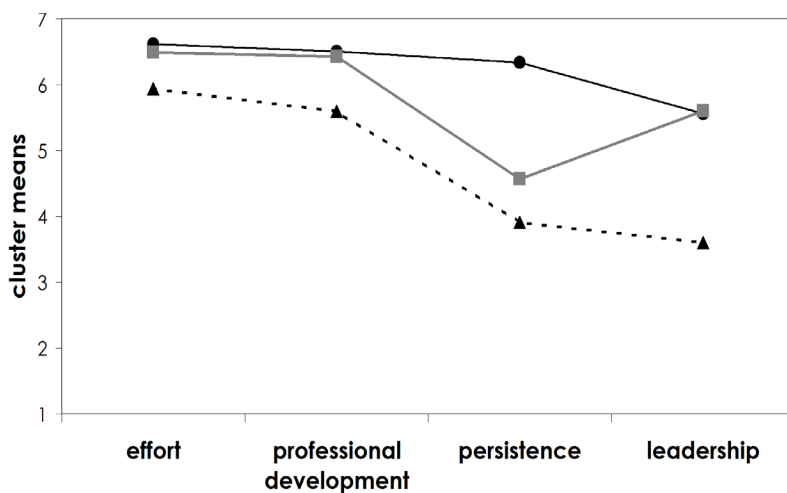


Kari Wilkins is doing her PhD in the area of organisational health and teacher wellbeing. She has a background in secondary teaching and educational and developmental psychology.

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 vacations 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. **CHEE CHEE LEUNG**

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.

Teachers' Career Choice

Many of the factors nominated 20 years ago in the U.S. as to why teaching was becoming an unattractive career choice continue to circulate today. Recent work in the U.S. suggests that the increasing salary gap between teaching and other professions, poor working conditions in schools, combined with the disappointments and hardships from teaching, are now influential in why new teachers leave the profession. Schools and teaching attract bad press, fostering pervasive views among the public and teachers themselves that schools are often chaotic and unpleasant places. Global media exposure of teacher and student shootings in schools in locations across the U.S. and other countries has done little to disconfirm such perceptions. The availability of drugs among students, and the low priority of school funding in some locations, compounded by having to work with unmotivated students who lack discipline, have all impacted on the attractiveness of teaching as a career. Such factors are said to have sapped the energy and commitment of many initially enthusiastic professionals. However, for some teachers, the very idea of working in socio-economically distressed urban or remote rural locations with underprivileged children and adolescents, is why they are attracted in the first place. How can the teaching profession now attract and retain the highest quality new graduates? To date, the field of educational research has fallen short of its potential to provide sufficient answers to this critical question. Current debates largely ignore the fact that teaching is an intensely interpersonal profession requiring complex social and cognitive skills. Thus, effective teaching requires much more than the content and pedagogical knowledge obtained during training. Our FITChoice program of research investigates the range of critical aspects impacting on teacher quality and retention.

www.fitchoice.org

fitchoice@education.monash.edu.au

U.S. Contact Details: Lauren Musu
734-763-1386 lmusu@umich.edu

Faculty of Education, Monash University
Clayton Campus, Wellington Road
Melbourne, VIC 3800 Australia

Dr Helen Watt 61 3 9905 3276
helen.watt@education.monash.edu.au

Dr Paul Richardson 61 3 9905 2771
paul.richardson@education.monash.edu.au