The Call to Teach:

Identifying Pre-Service Teachers’ Motivations, Expectations and Key Experiences During Initial Teacher Education in Australia and the United Kingdom

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on particular aspects of an international longitudinal study of pre-service teachers of secondary school subject English. It profiles two cohorts of pre-service teachers: one in Sydney, Australia, and one in Cambridge, United Kingdom. Drawing on the context of current concerns about teacher recruitment and retention, the study investigates pre-service teachers’ educational and professional backgrounds; their reasons for entering the teaching profession; their short-term and longer-term professional goals; their prevailing attitudes about teaching and learning, teaching English, and the teaching profession more generally; and their notional professional beliefs and sense of ‘selfhood’ as a teacher. The results of this particular phase of the longitudinal study are presented with a focus on the development of teacher identity and the evolving profile and nature of the English teaching profession in both Australia and the United Kingdom.

‘It has always been my dream to teach …’

(Pre-service teacher, 2002)

Introduction

Secondary school teacher education courses in Australia are enjoying healthy levels of interest from school-leavers, university undergraduates, recent and not-so-recent graduates, and others who are choosing to teach after one or more established careers. Indeed, as a recent Australian report for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) noted:
In the United Kingdom, recruitment numbers are not as buoyant and are frequently aligned with particular subjects: mathematics, for example, often struggles to recruit; physics has a similar story. Recent policy moves, notably the introduction of the training ‘salary’ (so-called ‘golden hellos’ of £4,000 for graduate teachers entering state schools and remaining there for a year) and further financial incentives relating to subject shortages, have all been designed to attract, and, importantly, to retain, teachers. The UK Government Teacher Training Agency (TTA) has even set out to construct teaching as a ‘drop in/drop out’ occupation, inviting people who want career changes to enter teaching with a deliberate intention to leave after a relatively short period of time and to move into other career areas. This latter initiative has not, thus far, met with substantial success as a strategy for recruitment.

Well-targeted recruitment strategies in Australia, such as, for example, teach.NSW, with its catchy media campaigns; appealing slogan, ‘Teach – and make a difference’; shopfront; telephone inquiry line and associated website; and financial incentives and scholarships for teachers signing up in hard-to-staff subject areas and schools, have borne fruit in terms of attracting people to consider teaching as a career. The Australian campaigns to date have not, however, explicitly marketed teaching as a ‘drop in/drop out’ career, although accelerated programs for teacher training or retraining have been implemented to fill recruitment gaps in shortage subjects such as mathematics, science, and design and technology.

Predictions about teacher supply in Australia, the UK, and the United States, underline a continued need to attend to issues of teacher recruitment in these so-called shortage subjects as well as staffing of high teacher turnover schools. More urgently, research in these countries, and others, has fuelled a growing concern about rates of teacher attrition, particularly attrition of early career teachers within the first three to five years of employment (cf. Hunt and Carroll 2003, Ingersoll 2001 2004, OECD 2004, Ramsey 2000, Ross 2002, Skilbeck and Connell 2003, Smithers and Robinson 2003). Such studies have argued that the real problem in teacher supply is no so much recruitment, but teacher turnover and attrition:

The conventional wisdom is that we lack enough good teachers. But the conventional wisdom is wrong. The real school staffing problem is teacher retention … the teacher retention/turnover issue has deep roots and far reaching consequences. (Hunt and Carroll, No Dream Denied, 2003, p. 10)

Hunt and Carroll go on to contend that ‘teacher retention has become a national crisis … teacher turnover is now undermining teacher quality and it is driving teacher shortages … It is as if we are pouring teachers into a bucket with a fist-sized hole in the bottom’ (Hunt and Carroll 2003, p. 10).

The present study

There is need for further more detailed study of movement in and out of teaching, particularly by teachers in the younger age cohort.

(Skilbeck and Connell 2003, pp. 32–3)

Drawing on this broader context of current concerns about teacher supply, retention and attrition, this paper reports on aspects of an international, longitudinal study of the experiences of two groups of prospective secondary school English teachers in Australia and the United Kingdom. In this first phase, the study investigates and profiles who wants to teach English; their backgrounds and prior experiences; why these people decide to teach English; their expectations of teaching; and their attitudes towards and beliefs about English teaching at the beginning, during and at the completion of, the Initial Teacher Education (ITE) program, as well as after a period of employment. The present paper focuses on data collected at the commencement of, and during, the ITE program only.

The study also aims to generate deeper understandings of why it is that some English teachers continue to teach beyond the early career phase while others decide to leave, often for good. Do new entrants into programs perceive teaching as a ‘revolving door’ profession – one in which they will participate for a short period of time and then move on to another career? Or, do they embark upon teacher education courses with a sense of a longer-term vocation? How, and in what ways, is the call to teach bound up with the selfhood of the emerging teacher? What are the implications of this for the quality of secondary English education for our nation’s pupils?

There is a range of statistical data on teacher reten-
tion and attrition that enumerates trends in teacher resignations: the available data show that only 23% of resignations in secondary schools in Australia and 34% of resignations in secondary schools in the UK are retirement related (OECD 2002b, p. 75). Therefore, more than 75% of resignations in Australia and 66% in the UK are for reasons other than retirement.

The present study seeks to consider the stories behind these disaggregated figures: to probe the statistics to ask what is happening and why it is happening? While quantitative studies provide important generalisable patterns in teacher recruitment, retention and attrition, it is principally through qualitative studies, such as for example, narrative inquiry, that the more subtle dimensions of new teacher experience may be illuminated (cf. Clandinin and Connelly 2000). As McGaw observed, when it comes to the crisis in teacher retention and attrition, we require qualitative research to address a quantitative problem (McGaw 2002).

The participants

The present study is based upon research with thirty students in the first year of a graduate entry, two-year, full-time Master of Teaching degree at the University of Sydney, Australia, and twenty-two students in a graduate, one-year, full-time Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) at the University of Cambridge, United Kingdom. Pre-service teachers participated in the investigation by completing a questionnaire at the entry point to the ITE program and at the completion of the ITE program. They were also interviewed after periods of practicum or ‘school placement’, with the interview designed to gather data on attitudes and beliefs about English teaching, and any shifts or developments that may have occurred since entry into ITE. Throughout the program, they maintained reflective learning journals and from these, constructed narratives that explored key experiences in their professional development within the context of the ITE continuum.

Entry level questionnaire reponses

1. Who wants to teach English?

The participants in this study entered teacher education having completed at least an undergraduate degree. They were graduates with predominantly English degrees, most often in literature but occasionally in language and literature; a proportion also arrived with modular degrees comprising a substantial component (over 50%) in English, with the other 50% in a closely related area such as, for example, media studies, linguistics or drama. From responses gathered during interviews, these graduates have often identified teaching as a career quite early on in their lives. The question ‘Why do you want to teach’, is typically answered with variations on this response: ‘As far back as I can remember I have always wanted to teach’. Sometimes this aspiration is rooted in family experience with parents or close relatives teaching (though sadly this is often accompanied by the comment that ‘I’m going into teaching despite the fact that they are telling me not to’); sometimes it is because they have had work experience in related areas (youth work for example) and frequently it is because of a professed love of their subject.

1.1 Career changers

Of the thirty students in the postgraduate Master of Teaching sample at Sydney University, 53% said that teaching was not a first career. This statistic is more than double the Australian national figure quoted by the Australian Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCYEETA) in 2002. Of those participants who chose teaching as a second or later career, when asked to identify the broad reason for changing careers, 82% said they had changed careers for ‘personal fulfilment’ reasons. Of those who had a career prior to beginning a teaching course, many were from other professions and the corporate world. 4% of the group had come to teaching later in life after having spent time parenting. Former careers of the Sydney University cohort included: Journalism; Law; Film Production; Tourism; Medicine; Acting; Human Resources; Hospitality; Small Business; and Graphic Design.

At Cambridge University for the parallel year, only six out of the twenty-seven participants, or 22%, had come to teaching from a previous career or careers. These previous careers included: Tourism; Secretarial and Administrative work; ICT careers; and general office work. Several other students had just completed Masters courses and one participant had just completed his PhD. A recent study of people in the UK who changed careers to teach outlined six broad profiles for career changers: the parent; the successful careerist; the freelancer; the late starter; the serial careerist; and the young career changer (Priyadharshini and Robinson-Pant 2003, p. 98). While these profiles are to some extent corroborated in the present study, it is important to note the diversity of backgrounds and pathways of participants, particularly at Sydney University. What is
striking about the backgrounds of those entering teaching as a second or later career is the breadth of experience, knowledge and skills they bring with them into teacher education programs, and, subsequently, into the profession.

Those participants who entered teacher education as a second or later career, in both the Sydney and Cambridge samples, were asked to identify the specific reasons why they changed careers. Typical of the responses were:

- Desire for a high level of job satisfaction
- Disenchantment or dissatisfaction with a previous career: ‘I didn’t share the profit motive factor’ and ‘My previous profession had not lived up to the dream’
- Personal priorities had changed
- Desire for personally fulfilling work
- Worked in TEFL during an overseas trip and had been working without qualifications
- Personal and family circumstances changed
- Attracted to a sense of community in teaching
- Attracted by the opportunity to gain employment around the world
- Aspired to work with young people
- Wanted to make a difference.

The study by Priyadharshini and Robinson-Pant (2003) also identified reasons for changing careers to teach as: job dissatisfaction; alienation or isolation; need for greater stability and security; changing perspectives on life; memories of school; and the desire to use specialist subject knowledge (Priyadharshini and Robinson-Pant 2003, p. 98). The present study clearly highlights this range of motivations for changing careers to teach: more than 90% of the combined sample strongly identified intrinsic and altruistic motivations to teach (Kyriacou and Coulthard 2000, p. 117) such as the desire for personal fulfilment, while a small proportion expressed more extrinsic motivations (Kyriacou and Coulthard 2000) such as the need to have a qualification and be employed, or the pragmatic need to adapt to changed family circumstances. On the whole, the reasons for changing careers were positive rather than negative.

1.2 The significance of previous experience

It is often presumed by experienced teachers and the wider public that new teachers are predominantly first career graduates. The recent trend towards a higher proportion of second or later career entrants into teaching not only alters the profile of the profession during the initial career phase of employment. It also necessitates a heightened awareness on the part of teachers, teacher educators, and employers that a significant proportion of so-called ‘beginning’ teachers may and do in fact bring a depth of life experience and diverse expertise into the profession that can go untapped, and, even worse, be marginalised or occluded unless appropriately recognised and celebrated. They do not come to teacher education as passive tabula rasa. They have typically entered teaching with a strong sense of personal agency and a degree of self-determination. They have been active in making decisions – at times risky ones – to control the nature and direction of their future. This sense of agency emerges in many of the narratives when participants reflected on their learning and professional growth. The appeal of teaching is in no small part the appeal of a profession where this agency can be put to good service. In other words, these career changers often come to teaching with deeply-held personal beliefs about the potential for the teacher to create, affirm, build connections and act to good effect (Boomer and Torr 1987), constructing teaching as a potent force for change in society. One career changer in this study articulated this dimension of teacher motivation in his narrative:

A teacher cannot achieve his or her goals with any effectiveness without the connection with students which comes from knowledge and love ... Knowledge of a student's foibles and fears, strengths and triumphs, aspirations ... Love which says that each one has value and is to be valued wholly, be he a model student or she recalcitrant. A classroom is a family where everyone must make a contribution. (Pre-service teacher, 2002)

Here, the writer uses the metaphor of the classroom as microcosm of creative, democratic social relations - as ‘a family where everyone must make a contribution’ – to conflate education, social justice and love. The language has a quasi-religious tone, and expresses a reverence for both student and subject. For this pre-service teacher, the work of teaching and learning takes on meaning redolent of a quest or a mission. Importantly, this writer represents himself, and education, as active, engaging, collaborative, creative and meaning-making.

There has been considerable research undertaken over the past decade-and-a-half into the beliefs that pre-service teachers bring with them into teacher education courses: the nature of these beliefs, their representation in metaphor and story; the ways in which these beliefs
influence not only what is learnt in pre-service education, but how it is learnt and the implications of these things for teacher identity, professional development, and efficacy as classroom practitioners. (cf. Stuart and Thurlow 2000, Maxon and Mahlios 1994). The present research with pre-service teachers in Australia and the UK affirms the continued significance of personal beliefs and their role in developing teacher identity. It also demonstrates the ways in which the participants imagine the self as teacher-constructing and representing this self in a range of ways that embodies their principles and ‘dreams’ as an educator.

2. Factors influencing the decision to become a teacher

The call to teach does not come from external encounters alone – no outward teacher or teaching will have much effect until the soul assents. Any authentic call ultimately comes from the voice of the teacher within, the voice that invites me to honour the nature of my true self. (Palmer 1998, p. 29)

When asked to identify the principal reasons for choosing to teach, an overwhelming majority of the total sample groups at both Sydney and Cambridge identified ‘personal fulfilment’; ‘the desire to contribute to society’; ‘a sense of vocation’; ‘working with young people’; ‘the fulfilment of a dream’; and ‘enjoyment and/or love of the subject’ as their fundamental motivation. Intrinsic and altruistic factors (Kyriacou and Coulthard 2000) prevailed in response to this question: factors that underline the intimate connection between the individual’s personal journey and the promise of the teaching profession to offer ‘connectedness of the self to a larger realm’, ‘enjoyment’, ‘the realisation of a dream’, ‘gratification’, and ‘the opportunity to contribute to a broader social mission’ (Pre-service teacher responses).

Participants were free to name more than one reason for entering teaching, hence the table below has values that add up to more than 100%.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivation</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal fulfilment/fulfilment of a dream</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyment/love of/passion for English</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with young people</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to contribute to society</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifestyle/working hours/conditions/portability</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other*</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salary</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* ‘Other’ responses included family role models, influence of others, holidays, compatibility with parenting.

The results from this question also strongly endorse findings from other research in the field of teacher motivation. Three decades ago Lortie’s study of teachers in the United States, for example, identified the attractions of teaching as its interpersonal qualities; the capacity for the teacher to maintain authentic intellectual engagement with the disciplines they were passionate about; and a sense of service to the greater social good (Lortie 1975). Similarly, a longitudinal study of 196 graduates from the University of Sydney in 2003 reported that factors such as ‘a satisfying career’; ‘helping others’; ‘contributing to society’; ‘working with young people’; and ‘promoting student learning’ were rated as ‘important, very important or extremely important’ by more than 90% of the participants (Ewing and Smith 2003).

Similarly, the work by Reid and Caldwell (1997) and Spear, Gould and Lee (2000) found that PGCE students were motivated to enter teaching by factors such as: ‘enjoying working with children’; the promise of high levels of job satisfaction; the desire to ‘share knowledge’; and the ‘profound wish to improve children’s life chances.’ (Reid and Caudwell 1997, p. 47) Despite differences in time, place and external conditions, research has demonstrated, decade after decade, that those entering the teaching profession do so primarily because of these intrinsic reasons: the current research highlights the emphasis in many participants’ responses on the ‘social justice’ dimensions of education facilitated through effective teaching and learning. As one pre-service teacher remarked:

I want to work in a community-based career. I want to work with my subject and to help others enjoy it … I am passionate about education and its place in society and passionate about access to good government-run education for all. (Pre-service teacher, 2002)

Consistent with other research in the field, salary did not figure in this research as a significant reason for choosing to teach. Other studies similarly indicate that salary is not a determining factor in the initial decision to teach, but may well be an important factor for choosing not to undertake a teaching degree, or not to teach once qualified, or it may be the impetus for some to choose to resign from teaching after a period of time.

It is not unusual at the early pre-service stage of the teacher development continuum, particularly for prospective secondary school teachers, to place considerable value on the role of the subject they have chosen to teach: they commonly express a passion for their
chosen subject which is integral to their developing concept of self as a teacher, and teaching and learning more generally. Parker Palmer contends that when it comes to choosing to teach:

Many of us were drawn to a body of knowledge because it shed light on our identity as well as on the world. We did not merely find a subject to teach – the subject also found us … that subject evoked a sense of self that was only dormant in us before we encountered the subject’s way of naming and framing life. (Palmer 1998, p. 25)

One of the well documented developments that often occurs during teacher education, however, is pre-service teachers’ evolving sense of themselves as teachers of students and not simply as teachers of subjects. This is particularly evident once these pre-service teachers undertake practical experience in schools. As one participant in the present study wrote after her first practical experience:

My concept of what it means to be an English teacher hasn’t changed, but it has evolved. English teachers don’t just teach a subject; they teach students, values, beliefs, attitudes and world perceptions.

(Pre-service teacher, 2002)

Similarly, another participant articulated this important broadening of focus:

Part of my philosophy is the hope that I never lose that sense of wonder at the diversity of students and their talents and achievements and the sense of joy at being present during some of their formative years. Somewhere amongst it all I am slowly developing a clearer picture of how I see myself as an educator …

(Pre-service teacher, 2002)

In response to a period of time spent teaching, one participant said of her experience:

Well, I’ve seen and heard a lot of things that will stay with me for a long time. I don’t think I’ve been disappointed by anything. I feel I have learned so much. Teaching the same people twice a week for several weeks gives you a new perspective on life – I see some things the way they see them, and learn things about myself. I didn’t expect that.

(Pre-service teacher, 2002)

Repeatedly, pre-service teachers in the sample expressed their desire to teach as something more than merely a functional or technical enterprise. Instead they constructed teaching as an endeavour integrally linked to their sense of self or the ‘who’ of teaching, and, as is evident in the excerpt above, self-discovery for both teacher and student. The spiritual dimensions of teaching were sometimes explicit, but more often tacit in the narratives as participants explored their developing selfhood as teachers, and the hope for ‘connectedness’:

One of my ideals that has not changed … is that it is still important to be able to say I connected with the students I came into contact with … to reach across the crevasse … to be invited into their world, and whilst there to shake it up a little. I’m not stupid enough to expect this to happen all the time, but it is, at the end of the day, what I feel this teaching thing is all about. It will remain my touchstone of personal and professional success.

(Pre-service teacher, 2002)

Teaching is regularly defined in terms of the personal experience of ‘connection’ or relationship with others. In the excerpt from this narrative, there is a sense of the holistic nature of teaching and learning and the personal challenge to ‘reach across the crevasse’ and engage with students not simply as intellectual beings pursuing academic goals, but as individuals with personal ‘worlds’ that are valued and respected by the teacher. The capacity for ‘connection’ becomes a measure of this pre-service teacher’s vision of ‘success’. Once again, the conflation of the personal and the professional in this narrative is typical of other narratives by pre-service teachers in the sample. It is also indicative of the ways in which pre-service teachers of English in this group are active participants in constructing, interpreting and representing their particular vision of what it means to be a teacher (Doecke, Loughran and Brown 2000). This representation often draws on enduring universal archetypes, metaphors and symbols of the journey, the pilgrimage and the quest.

3. Expectations of teaching as a career

Teaching is becoming to some extent a career of ‘movement in and out’ - and the out may be permanent.

(Skilbeck and Connell 2003, pp. 32–3)

Part of the current debate about teacher recruitment, retention and attrition has been the hypothesis that teaching is becoming a ‘revolving door’ profession: a ‘job’ that people consciously choose to ‘drop in and out of’, or to work in for a short period of time and move onto other types of work (cf. Skilbeck and Connell 2003; a position espoused in policy by the TTA in the UK). Is it the case that entrants into teacher education expect to be teaching for a limited period of time? Do they consider teaching as a temporary or short-term ‘job’, rather than as a longer-term commitment to a profession or ‘vocation’?
Participants in the present study were asked to predict the span of their commitment to the teaching profession. The combined results are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2 – Predictions of length of time in the teaching profession

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of time in teaching profession</th>
<th>Percentage of Combined Sample</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 years or more</td>
<td>89.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5–10 years</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3–5 years</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2–3 years</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–2 years</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other*</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Other includes responses such as: ‘I hope to be teaching in 10 years from now, but I am not sure’; ‘Not sure I can predict’; ‘I hope so’.

The evidence from the present study demonstrates that these entrants into teaching are, at the commencement of ITE, overwhelmingly committed to teaching for a period of at least 10 years. Not one participant expected to leave teaching within 3 years. Only 3% saw that teaching was a shorter-term career, lasting for between 3 and 5 years. More than double this figure identified a career timeframe of 5 to 10 years of teaching. Given that 7.6% of the sample was aged over 45 years, and for these respondents, the predicted length of time teaching would be circumscribed by factors such as ageing and natural retirement, there is resounding evidence here that for this group pre-service teachers, the intention to teach over the longer-term is unequivocal.

This research does not support the hypothesis that entrants into teaching perceive their career in terms of a ‘drop-in, drop-out’ cycle. To the contrary: their expectations of teaching as a career are deeply bound up with their sense of self and their quest for fulfilment over the longer term.

For the majority of participants in this study, both in Australia and the United Kingdom, the decision to teach is not based on a utilitarian view of teaching, nor is it driven by pragmatic, matter-of-fact models of serial career planning that have gained currency in the contemporary world of work. The expectation for these participants is of a ‘vocation’ that demands of them high levels of individual commitment and a reverence for the place of personal stories in understanding and interpreting human experience. As one pre-service teacher put it:

If our lives are stories then we all have tales to tell ... A major task of the English teacher is to be supportive of the students whose storied existence is part of what I believe to be a grander narrative. Stories reflect values which may be neither constant or complete, and the students have every right to expect that their own emerging sense of self and values are given freedom, space and time to be expressed. (Pre-service teacher, 2002)

This reflection echoes the tenets of the work done by researchers in the field of narrative inquiry and teacher identity, and recalls Connelly and Clandinin when they reiterated the universal idea that ‘life is a story we live ... a powerful way to imagine who we are, where we have been, and where we are going’ (Connelly and Clandinin 1994, p. 149).

4. A significant mentor or teacher

The participants were asked whether or not there had been, or continues to be, a significant mentor or teacher who influenced their decision to teach. A number of studies on the motivations of prospective teachers have identified the role of a ‘significant other’ as a persuasive force in the decision to teach. Reid and Caudwell, for example, questioned a group of 453 Postgraduate Certificate in Education students in the United Kingdom. 22% of the sample reported that they had been inspired by their former teacher(s) to pursue teaching as a career (Reid and Caudwell, 1997).

We were keen to identify the extent to which the participants in this study were swayed by their own experience of teachers as personal role models. More than 87% of this sample agreed that there is, or has been, a significant teacher or mentor who influenced the decision to become a teacher. This is a powerful affirmation of the generative capacity of the profession, since the vast majority of those who responded ‘yes’, identified a former teacher as their inspiration for entering teaching: high school teachers; senior English teachers; primary school teachers; and one respondent identified a university teacher. Another participant said that his significant mentors were ‘fictional ones’, while several participants identified their father as their inspiration to become a teacher. Once again this evidence underlines the intensely relational nature of teaching: a strong majority of this sample was persuaded to become teachers because of a relationship with a current or previous role model. Reflecting on the central place of the mentor in the ‘ancient and exacting exchange
called education’ (Palmer 1998, p. 10), Palmer believes that:

The power of our mentors is not necessarily in the models of good teaching they gave us, models that may turn out to have little to do with who we are as teachers. Their power is in their capacity to awaken a truth within us, a truth we can reclaim years later by recalling their impact on our lives … mentors and apprentices are partners in an ancient human dance … it is the dance of the spiralling generations, in which the old empower the young with their experience and the young empower the old with new life, reweaving the fabric of the human community as they touch and turn.’

(Palmer 1998, pp. 21,25)

This internalised assumption about teaching as a cycle of influence, held by many in the present research, points to a need for strong networks of significant others, or mentors, within the profession itself, to sustain and support the work of new teachers.

5. Key attributes of an effective teacher of English

The questionnaire asked pre-service teachers to identify what they considered to be the key attributes of a successful and effective English teacher. This was an open question, rather than a multiple choice question, so it was incumbent upon participants to generate their own ideas. The combined responses included the following list of attributes and qualities (Table 3). Participants could respond with more than one attribute.

Considering that these participants had no formal contact with teacher education or education in contexts other than their own schooling, as parents, or in undergraduate studies, this is a detailed catalogue of those qualities that have regularly been identified in the research literature as exemplifying successful teachers (cf. Brock 2000). An OECD statement examining the characteristics of the teaching profession, for example, defines it as the ‘knowing and caring’ profession (OECD, 1994).

It is interesting to note the absence in the participants’ responses of attributes explicitly associated with technique or method, or qualities that could be associated with the ‘how and what’ of teaching and learning. Instead, there is a clear emphasis on the relational and interpersonal dimensions of teaching: on qualities that emanate from the ‘who’ of teaching or the ‘self’ of the teacher.

What does this set of responses tell us then about pre-service English teachers’ beliefs about, and attitudes towards, teaching? It reminds us that they are not blank slates waiting to be ‘prepared’ by teacher education: they come to teacher education with substantial notions of what it means to enter into the exchange called education. Often, this is expressed in terms of the particular characteristics of subject English:

I want my students to see the value in great literature. I want them to see that sometimes we need great words as much as we need food or shelter, that ideas expressed clearly and with beauty can help us make meaning in a world that might otherwise seem senseless and cruel, that we are not the only ones who have ever felt this way and that some ideas occur and recur across centuries and are part of what makes us human. I want them to find pleasure and solace in language and literature, and to learn to have fun with it. (Pre-service teacher, 2002)

English – in this case, English literature – is conceived as the crucible for learning. Engagement with literature is considered to be the key to English teaching and learning and to the individual’s enlightenment and pleasure. It is noticeable in many of the written reflections the extent to which the teacher and teaching is

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>% Percentage of participants who identified this quality</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caring</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good communication skills</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love of subject/passion for subject/mastery of subject</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathetic and understanding</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patient</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open-minded</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committed to education as an ideal</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respects students</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to help students achieve their best/encouraging</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loves working with young people</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepared to be a life-long learner</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiastic/Curious</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive role model</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works well in a team</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive guide for young people</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivated</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolerant</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of subject</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspirational</td>
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<td>Ability to get the best out of students from all backgrounds</td>
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perceived as active, dynamic and energetic. Teacher education plays an essential role in developing, enhancing, grounding, problematising, theorising and even contesting pre-service teachers’ notions, as well as providing a myriad of other vital experiences, including pedagogical experiences. But it is surely necessary to proceed with an understanding of the subtleties and the layers of experience that these teachers bring with them into ITE courses, and later, into the teaching profession. The implications of this for teacher induction and teacher retention can be far reaching.

6. Potential challenges
After extensive practical experience, pre-service teachers were asked to explore any potential impediments to their original goals as teachers. This question was included in order to elicit from participants the extent of their awareness of the ‘realities’ of life in schools. In the debate about teacher retention and attrition, some researchers have turned our attention to the nexus between teacher education and teacher attrition and retention: are pre-service teachers adequately prepared for the ‘realities’ of the classroom and schools in general? Do they enter teaching with ‘false expectations’ (Stokkin et al. 2003, p. 330) and as a consequence, leave within a short period of time having been confronted with the exigencies of an overly demanding workplace? Bullough contends that school culture may be a factor in attrition: schools operate according to a ‘modern’ culture that is fixed in its structures and procedures, whereas the culture outside the school can be seen as ‘post-modern’, characterised by change, diversity, complexity and insecurity (Bullough 1997). Does the ‘clash’ of the two cultures lead to early career teacher drop-out?

Pre-service teachers in the present study spent considerable time in schools, engaging in the day-to-day work of teaching classes, administering, planning, programming, attending meetings, consulting with students and parents, and so on. In the UK sample, and by statute, student teachers spent 66% of the time during the PGCE in schools. In the Australian sample, student teachers spent 40% of the time during the Master of Teaching in schools, including an extensive internship.

The present research provides some evidence to counter the view that pre-service teachers embark upon teaching with false expectations of the realities of schools and classrooms. The responses of participants in this study suggest that the majority in the sample, after extensive periods of time in schools, do not enter the profession with an untested or uncritiqued idealism. The responses of these pre-service teachers attest to the insights they have gathered about, for example, the working conditions, staffroom dynamics, school culture, challenging student situations, rigorous schedules, and the demands of the bureaucracy. Responses included (all quotations):

Filtering the cynicism of the cynical
Other staff members’ projections
Negative vibes from existing teachers
The negative influence of other teachers in the staffroom
Ageing colleagues
Pressures to perform
Lack of psychological support in schools
School policies
Excessive demands for paper from the bureaucracy
An ‘instinctive loathing’ of bureaucracy and administration beyond which is minimally required
Frustration with hoops to jump through
Assessment and reporting
Frustration with the state of some students’ lives
Individual students
Vast amounts of content
Stress
Exhaustion
Giving in to perfectionism
Sometimes having too high expectations of myself
Being new and alone and lost
Broken or missing equipment
The school environment may not support my philosophy of teaching.

Interestingly, the range of responses here covers the spectrum from the practical problems of broken equipment to the more profound questions of teacher professionalism, potential deprofessionalisation, poor school culture, bureaucratic demands and fears of marginalisation. Predominantly, the responses emphasised participants’ concerns about the ‘cultural space’ generated by the staff and how they would negotiate their way in and through this. Few responses at all identified issues relating to students or classroom experience as potential disincentives to remain in the profession. Overwhelmingly, the potential road-blocks for these pre-service teachers were perceived to be squarely located in the domain of school and staff culture and what may be interpreted as the impact of managerialism on teachers’ work.

A telling excerpt from one participant explores these challenges of entering a profession where new teachers’ voices are often rendered marginal and even
silenced by the structures and culture of the school or the staffroom, or both. This pre-service teacher perceptively distinguishes between the potential negative influence of colleagues, and the attractions of engaging with the students he is teaching:

I have now seen at close hand the numerous ill effects of overwork in the teaching profession. Most serious is that rigour in preparation and delivery is sacrificed. At half load I felt just able to research and produce new materials in time for presentations within the constraints of the timetable. Even then the mixture was at times somewhat aerated.

The second-worst effect is the degradation of morale. My staff room was full of people who seemed to appear each day on sufferance. They quietly cursed and groaned through their timetables. They nourished addictions to sugar, nicotine and caffeine. They took a grim pleasure in recounting the distressed behaviour of students. They looked forward to the time that teaching would be a distant blot on their life histories.

The psychic landscape of the two staff rooms which I inhabited was monotonous and it soon became clear that although a desk and shelves had been set aside for me, there was no spare mental space in which I might be fully noticed and listened to.

I was not surprised by the likeableness and playfulness of the students with whom I worked.

(Pre-service teacher, 2002)

It is interesting to note that this pre-service teacher describes how he works with the students, yet finds no meaningful connection – either individually or collectively – with the other staff.

Indeed, the research on teacher retention and attrition to date clearly indicates that one of the major reasons why early career teachers make the decision to leave teaching for good is the related to the impact of negative socialisation, deficit school culture and disturbing rites of passage wrought by established teachers on newly appointed teachers (cf. Hunt and Carroll 2003, Manuel 2003, Boser 2000).

Conclusions

An important component of this research is the ongoing need to legitimise new teachers' stories. Those involved in any aspect of the teaching profession need to continue to hear the voices of the new teacher: to know about their expectations and their aspirations; to understand how they have constructed and interpreted this thing called teaching; and to make an authentic and visible space for the new teacher to enact their vision of what it means to be part of the teaching profession. Equally, the research underlines the extent to which those choosing to teach in this age of constant change and uncertainty, do enter ITE programs with deeply-held ideals and beliefs about the social value of teaching and learning; the generative power of education in children's lives and the ennobling capacity of good teaching, even within the context of negative public perceptions about the profession as a whole. In the case of English teachers, there is a profound belief in the encompassing role of language and literature in human experience. These people have entered the profession with longer-term aspirations that are bound up with their sense of self, and are enmeshed in a more expansive concept of teaching as service, mission and vocation. All participants expected to remain in teaching for at least three years, with an overwhelming majority of participants expecting to teach for at least 10 years or more. All participants expected teaching to be a personally fulfilling career.

The implications of this for teacher recruitment, retention and attrition are clear: ITE and employment induction programs need to take sufficient account of the holistic nature of new teachers' motivations and expectations and recognise that the majority of those entering the profession do so, at the outset, with a desire for a longer-term commitment that is often expressed with profoundly moral and spiritual dimensions. They enter teaching with an imperative to 'make a difference', 'change the world' and positively influence young people's lives. The extent to which these ideals are then challenged by the demands of the bureaucracy, negative school or staffroom culture, and unsupportive social structures, or simply a lack of support structures, all of which were recognised by pre-service teachers themselves as potential impediments to their goals as teachers, may well be critical in the broader context of early teacher resignations.

Importantly, this study has highlighted the significant similarities between the two groups of pre-service teachers in Australia and the UK when it comes to motivations and expectations. Despite the differences in their geographical, cultural, educational and other contexts, the participants' responses to questions of motivations and expectations were remarkably seamless. Indeed, even within the groups, analysis by gender, age group and background did not produce significant differences in any of the key questions. This can be explained partly by the fact that the two groups were specifically pre-service teachers of subject English and this can be seen as one unifying factor. Additionally, both cohorts entered teacher education as post-gradu-
ates, with a substantial number coming to teaching after one or more other careers. While there is a danger in treating these two groups as homogeneous, and this research has not set out to do this, clearly there are commonalities on the major questions of motivation to teach and expectations.

The importance of a love of, and passion for, subject English as a motivating force in the call to teach figured strongly in a majority of questionnaire responses and the narratives. All participants expected to teach English if and when they were appointed to a teaching position. It is crucial to recognise, then, that when teachers are appointed to positions where they are expected to teach out of their specialisation, there are clearly implications for their levels of satisfaction and longer-term career choices.

As an important follow-up to this ITE-based investigation, this sample of pre-service teachers will be interviewed during their early employment phase. This follow-up study will seek to profile their work patterns; explore the extent to which the motivations and expectations identified during ITE have been met or otherwise; and examine their expectations for future career directions. Importantly, the follow-up research will identify where, when, and in what curriculum areas the teachers have been employed; their main challenges and the highlights of their experiences to date.

In its range of manifestations, the vision of pre-service teachers in this study has confirmed the extent to which entering the profession in the twenty-first century is anything but a lightly considered utilitarian or commercially-driven act. Illustrative of the tenor of many of the participants’ writing, this eloquent statement by one new teacher captures a sense of what it means to be called to teach:

I want my students to tap into that essential human impulse of story telling, the instinct we have had for thousands of years to shape our lives into narratives. The magic of telling stories and hearing them be told, something that makes us conscious humans and not simply consumers … My philosophy includes a bit of magic … The magic is a quality that economic rationalists cannot put a value on …

(Pre-service teacher, 2002)

It is with great interest then, that this study will seek to find out if three years on, for this teacher, and for the many others who participated in this research, the ‘bit of magic’ has thrived or has withered.

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