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"Teachers of Promise": Is Teaching Their First Career Choice?

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Abstract:

This study, as part of a larger longitudinal study, "Teachers of Promise", seeks to explore the perceptions and experiences of a group of teachers judged to have the potential to become strong teachers. It is these promising teachers who are needed for a strong and vibrant teaching profession, and it is these teachers who are most likely to leave teaching. Entrants to teaching have been differentiated according to the pathways of first career and career/job-changers. This study shows no appreciable differences between the two groups of teachers in their reasons for entering teaching, a finding that accords with international experience. Given international concerns about recruitment and retention in the teaching profession, there is an increasing need for messages about teaching as a career choice to be positive rather than negative.

Finding out why people are attracted to teaching is important given concerns about the quality of prospective teachers and the relatively short time new teachers are choosing to stay in the profession. Research in a number of countries has demonstrated that large proportions of new teachers leave the profession within their first three to five years (Kilburg, 2003). In New Zealand, Elvidge (2002) reported an attrition rate from teaching of 37 percent. Such high rates of teacher turnover make it less likely that schools will be able to develop as learning communities (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004), which, in turn, may contribute to teachers' lives becoming less satisfying, further potentially exacerbating attrition. Closer investigation of the profiles of those attracted to teaching as a career and their respective pathways into the profession are needed to shed light on recruitment and retention concerns. There is evidence that the early career teachers most likely to leave the profession soon after entering it are those teachers judged by

their initial teacher education providers and colleagues to have the potential to be "strong teachers" (Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2005). This finding provides a compelling reason for the need for education systems to reduce this attrition by finding ways to ensure teaching is an attractive career option for the longer term. The purpose of the study documented in this article is to highlight the attractions of teaching as a career choice for first career entrants and career/job changers. This study is part of the larger, longitudinal Teachers of Promise Study (TOPS).[1]

LITERATURE REVIEW

This review considers a range of studies that address why people decide to enter the teaching profession. It explores this question from the perspective of student-teachers entering initial teacher education (ITE) programmes and those who are already in the teaching profession.

Of particular importance for future policy in teacher recruitment and retention is the report of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) of its 25 member countries in 2005. Barry McGaw (Director for Education OECD), claims in the foreword to this report that the report "provides probably the most comprehensive analysis ever undertaken of teacher policy issues at an international level" (p. 3). He notes that many OECD countries are currently facing major difficulties in teacher recruitment, teacher effectiveness and teacher shortages. The report lists four main concerns: the attractiveness of teaching as a career; developing teachers' knowledge and skills; recruitment, selection and employment of teachers; and retaining effective teachers in schools.

The OECD report highlights policy implications at two levels. The first concerns the teaching profession as a whole, with the particular focus on improving the status of the profession, facilitating labour market competitiveness and improving teacher development and school-work environments. The second centres on attracting and retaining particular types of teachers, and attracting teachers to work in particular schools. The issues of how to sustain teacher quality and ensure all teachers continue to engage in effective ongoing professional learning need addressing if teacher retention and job satisfaction are to be increased. The fact that the OECD report highlights the importance of the school as the key agency in the education system for improving student learning implies that schools also need to have more

responsibility and accountability for teacher selection, working conditions, and development.

Other international studies (see Johnson & the Project on the Next Generation of Teachers, 2004; Banby & Coe, 2004) focus on the career paths of teachers, and of these many look at why some teachers remain in the profession while others leave to enter alternative careers. Studies vary according to whether their participants are looking at perceived career choices ahead of time or are justifying actual choices made. A research study commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills in Britain and conducted by Edmonds, Sharp, and Benefield (2002) focused on the recruitment and retention into ITE programmes. This review of 42 empirical articles and reports identifies two main types of studies regarding young people's decisions to choose or reject teaching as a career. One concerns the sorts of decisions teacher-trainees make in choosing teaching as a career, while the other ascertains young people's decisions before they choose or reject a career in teaching and prior to any engagement with ITE. The authors suggest that both types of study offer valuable insights into why people choose or reject teaching. However, they favour studies involving self-reports from teacher-trainees (or studies that use several different sources of information) over studies that ask one party to make assumptions about the behaviour of another. Their overall finding was that intrinsic reasons dominated in the choice of teaching as a career. These included

> [the] enjoyment of working with children, the expectation that teaching would bring them intellectual challenge and the view that teaching makes an important contribution to society. They also identified an association between young people's previous experience of working with children and their desire to teach. (p. 63)

Further insights into recruitment and retention of teachers are provided by Peske, Liu, Johnson, Kauffman, and Kardos (2001) in their interviews with 50 first- and second-year teachers in Massachusetts. They propose a mixed model for the teaching career to cater for teachers who envision long-term careers and those who envision short-term stays in teaching. The authors claim that new conceptions of career are emerging in society and that many individuals now regard the notion of a single career or loyalty to a single organization as obsolete. However, despite this change towards young people having multiple career changes, Peske et al. question whether teaching will continue to attract the best possible candidates given that many of these candidates are likely to

have other employment options that offer better working conditions and higher pay.

The 50 students that Peske et al. interviewed included 36 teacher-trainees from traditional teacher preparation programmes and 14 from alternative programmes. The latter group had taught in public charter schools that did not require state licenses or had participated in the Massachusetts Signing Bonus Programme, which recruited people who had never taught in public schools and offered them an extra $20,000 over four years. The authors found that rather than regarding teaching as a calling and a lifetime commitment, the majority of new teachers – both those who completed traditional teacher preparation programmes and those who did not – approached teaching tentatively and conditionally with the view that teaching was only one of many careers they might have. The real challenge today, according to Peske et al., is not so much how to recruit teachers but how to retain them once they are hired. Thus, retaining the next generation of teachers may be considerably more difficult than retaining the previous generation of teachers. Even though, the authors continue, a substantial group of teachers in the future might give only five years or fewer to teaching, their contribution will be nevertheless valuable. Peske et al. suggest that work is needed to establish how the working conditions of teaching could be further improved to ensure teachers stay longer in their jobs.

Pathways into teaching differ from person to person. They include both direct (first career) and indirect routes (career changes). Johnson and fellow researchers involved in the Project on the Next Generation of Teachers (2004) note that it is now more common for new teachers to have experienced other careers and jobs before switching to teaching. While finding out what attracts people to teaching is important, such investigation also needs to take account of the varying pathways and time taken to reach decisions about teaching as a career.

Categories for Explaining Teaching as a Career Choice

A number of researchers have sought to explain teaching as a career choice. Nieto's (2005) study of 21 culturally and educationally diverse American K-12 classroom teachers identified four categories through participants' stories of why they had entered teaching. The first is described as "taking the long way". This category includes people who did not always want to be teachers and who spent time in other jobs before switching to teaching. The remaining categories are more altruistic. For example, those categorised as seeking to "make sense of

the world" viewed teaching as a "spiritual journey, a political commitment or a craft or vocation." A third category labelled "helping students to name and claim the world" signified those who were attracted to teaching because teaching seemed to offer opportunities "to help students find their voice and place in the world." The remaining category, "becoming fully human" referred to those who saw teaching as "a way of serving the public good and of contributing to positive change in the lives of young people." (p. xi)

In another study, Jarvis and Woodrow (2005) produced six categories from their study of secondary trainee-teachers' reasons for choosing teaching. This study presented 483 students with questionnaires containing open-ended questions rather than prompts in order to determine the students' reasons for choosing a career in teaching. The most popular response for all trainees was career-related, with 45% stating that they wanted a challenging, stable or rewarding career. Four other categories related to working with children. Of these, 16% of the respondents enjoyed their subject and wanted to pass on their love of that subject; a further 12% mentioned a love of children, wanting to work with children and wanting to inspire young people. Ten percent had always wanted to teach while 6% claimed to enjoy teaching from previous experiences and 4% wanted a change in career.

Kyriacou and Coulthard (2000) identified three broad categories explaining why people choose teaching as a career. Their study asked 297 students to complete a questionnaire in which they were asked to rate the importance of 20 factors in influencing their choice of career and then to rate the extent to which they thought teaching as a career offered these factors. Views were sought from undergraduate students representing a range of first-degree subjects at the University of York in England. Mature students and non-UK students were excluded. Three groups were compared: those who were definitely not considering teaching (N=102), those who were seriously considering teaching (N=40), and those who were undecided (N=155). All three groups rated "a job that I will find enjoyable" as the most important factor. Differences were also apparent between the groups. Those in the "definitely not considering teaching" group placed greater importance on "good promotion prospects" and "high earnings over length of career", while those in the "seriously considering teaching" group placed relatively greater emphasis on "a job where I will contribute to society" and "a job where I can care for others". The "undecided" group expressed views that, in most cases, fell between the views of the other

two groups. Differences between the three groups were also evident regarding the extent to which the respondents felt teaching offered these factors. For example, the "anti-teaching" group rated eight out of the 20 factors as being well met by teaching, the "undecided" group rated 10, and the "pro-teaching" group rated 12 factors. The authors suggest that these findings have important implications for campaigns to increase teacher recruitment.

In another literature review of recent studies focusing on the recruitment and retention of teachers, Bamby and Coe (2004) similarly categorised relevant issues into three areas. These include reasons for wanting to enter teaching, not wanting to enter teaching and wanting to leave teaching. These reasons provide two different ways of examining the situation on teacher recruitment. For example, questions asking teachers why they were going into teaching are likely to elicit intrinsic or altruistic motivations, whereas asking for reasons why a person would not be attracted towards teaching are more likely to highlight extrinsic reasons for being put off the profession. Bamby and Coe argue that an awareness that the "dissuading" factors are having more of an impact than the "persuading" factors to enter the profession provides a useful signal to those involved in recruitment and retention of teachers. Furthermore, Bamby and Coe suggest that if we are interested in examining the type of person that the teaching profession attracts, then the first question could be more relevant. Alternatively, clues towards improving teacher recruitment in general could be gleaned from finding out what issues are dissuading prospective teachers. Both questions, say the authors, are important to gaining a general picture of teacher recruitment.

Other studies have focused on the views of students once they have entered an ITE programme. Thornton and Reid (2001) sent questionnaires to 1,611 undergraduate and postgraduate English students about their choice of primary school teaching as a career, from 14 broadly representative teacher education providers in England. Data-gathering also included a further 148 follow-up interviews. The questionnaire asked students to indicate the importance, or not, of a given set of reasons for wanting to become a teacher. The interviews were designed to yield further depth to the reasoning behind their choices. Thornton and Reid found that "virtually all of the students had always wanted to teach, enjoyed working with children, felt that teaching brought job satisfaction, was a good career and would be challenging" (p. 111).

Closer to home, an Australian study by Mulholland and Hansen (2003) of 16 new male graduates, sought to provide improved understanding of what motivated young men to choose primary teaching as a career and their experiences of their university course. Semi-structured interview questions explored what family or other factors might have influenced the young men's decision to choose teaching, their perceptions of the teacher education programme and their ITE experiences in a feminised profession. The interviews involved emphasizing the participants' definitions of situations; encouraging the participants to structure accounts of situations and to give examples through illustrative story; and letting the participants introduce their notions of relevance. The authors reported as main findings the "wanting to work with children" theme as well as the attraction of good working conditions that teaching offered.

Another Australian study, by Manuel and Hughes (2006), investigated the motivations of a cohort of ITE students (N=79) undertaking a five-year, full-time combined undergraduate and ITE degree programme at the University of Sydney and specializing in secondary school teaching across a range of curriculum areas. Questionnaires were used to gather data on the characteristics of the cohort; the factors that influenced their decision to undertake a teaching degree; their educational and work backgrounds, perceptions of teaching, teachers and students; their expectations of a career in teaching; and their professional goals. The study found that 65.8% of the respondents decided on teaching for reasons that reflected personal aspirations to work with young people, to make a difference to their lives, to maintain a meaningful engagement with the subject area to which they were drawn, and to attain personal fulfilment and meaning. Two-thirds of the sample intended teaching for at least 10 years after being appointed. Fifty-seven percent of the students had chosen teaching as a first-career preference, while 43% had chosen teaching as a second or later career choice. More males chose teaching as a second or later career preference, rather than a first-career preference, whereas more females chose teaching as a first-career preference. In terms of both age and gender, males were older entrants to teaching while females were younger.

Within New Zealand, gender issues in primary teaching have been highlighted in Livingstone's literature review of men in primary schools. Livingstone (2002) has presented demographic data to highlight concerns about the continuing low numbers of men who choose

primary teaching in New Zealand schools. His review has canvassed entry characteristics of men in initial primary teacher education programmes, their selection process, preparation for teaching and points at which males have withdrawn from their initial teacher education, as well as their perceptions of teaching as a career. Demographic data from the Ministry of Education databases (1994-2001) have shown that, of all those choosing teaching as a career, the proportion of males has remained static over time at between 18 and 20 percent (p. 53). This literature review has provided a very useful account of the work done in New Zealand to illustrate the ongoing concern that male primary school teachers continue to be in the minority, apparently preferring other career choices.

Cushman has produced evidence from three studies (1998, 1999, 2000) to show that issues of status, salary and physical contact with children (and possible ramifications) are major concerns for those considering careers in teaching, those experiencing initial teacher education programmes and those already teaching. In her 2000 study, Cushman reported that the low status, particularly of primary school teaching, was evident in the responses of 56 percent of the 1008 Year 13 males sampled and just over 60 percent of 253 practising teachers, who in both cases described the status of teaching as being of moderate to extreme concern to them. One recurring theme was the notion that schools needed more males for "schools to be more closely aligned and representative of communities in which children ultimately function" (p. 87). The existing gender imbalance continues to exacerbate this problem because teaching is seen as a career for women rather than for men.

More recent research has been commissioned by the Ministry of Education and the New Zealand Teachers Council in their series named "The Teacher Status Project". Studies by Kane and Mallon (2006) and Hall and Langton (2006) have provided comprehensive data to indicate the importance of the perceived status of teaching as a career choice. For example, Hall and Langton have argued that the key difference between teaching and any other career choice is that everyone has (or thinks they have) a highly informed view of what teachers do on a day to day basis. Thus "people in the profession are the dominant force in shaping our views on teaching and teachers" (p. 31). The first phase of their study (N=95) presented the views of the general public (ranging from 12 year old students intending to go into tertiary study through to parents of tertiary students and business career influencers) regarding the status of teaching. The findings from focus group interviews clearly

demonstrated that teaching was not considered to be a high status profession or occupation in any of the 12 focus groups. Three primary drivers of status became evident from the focus group discussions; it was noted that teaching did not rate highly in terms of power, money or fame. Being well trained, highly skilled and having an impact on society in the future did not give teachers power, fame or riches which equated with high status (p. 1). A second phase in the Hall and Langton study included telephone interviews of 1145 people, who again included youth aged 12-25 years (N=634), adults (N=411), and employers (N=162). Overall, the survey interviews confirmed the focus group findings that teaching was not perceived as a particularly high status career. Barriers to teaching included pay, lack of authority/student behaviour problems, lack of support/appreciation and teacher negativity. On the positive side the attractions to teaching included influence/ importance, job security, wider opportunities and diversity.

Perceptions of teaching and teachers were also sought from Kane and Mallon's (2006) study canvassing those currently engaged in teaching or administering schools (including principals and Board of Trustee members), student teachers preparing for a career in teaching and senior secondary students who were making choices about their future work and careers. This national study involved participants from three regional clusters of schools and centres in Christchurch, Taranaki, and South Auckland. Questionnaires were completed by 790 teachers and principals/head teachers in primary, secondary and early childhood centres, 182 board/committee members, 410 student teachers and 598 senior students. Follow up interviews were held with smaller numbers from these groups of participants.

Kane and Mallon found that recruitment into teaching was influenced by candidates' intrinsic motivation and the degree to which they had been encouraged by others. While there is nothing extraordinary about this finding, what was illuminating was that for those already involved in teaching as a career or as student-teachers, decisions to teach were not necessarily influenced by wanting a high-status position, a job with a good image, or the need to be respected by the general public. However, the majority of the senior secondary students were not being attracted to teaching from their contact with existing teachers:

> Senior students reported that they were often directly discouraged from choosing teaching by teachers and were indirectly turned off through their daily encounters with overworked, underpaid and often less than positive teachers – all of which counter any claims to the job having high status or an attractive image." (p. *vi*)

The consensus from these senior students was that teaching was "underpaid, stressful and too ordinary", and their images of teachers were of them being "less than capable, unhappy and trapped in teaching" (p. *vi*). Similarly, the teachers, principals and head-teachers raised concerns about the variable quality of current student-teachers and graduating teachers. All of these perspectives have implications for teacher recruitment and retention.

These studies highlight the range of reasons (altruistic, intrinsic and extrinsic) and the personal characteristics, such as gender and age, associated with the decision to enter teaching. Again, these findings have implications for the ways in which teachers are recruited.

Research on Career-Changers

A growing body of research is also focusing on teacher career-changers, those people who come into teaching as a second-career choice. For example, Chambers (2002) documents that, in the US state of Illinois, increasing numbers of adults with prior careers are entering the teaching profession. Chambers interviewed 10 pre-service and in-service secondary teachers working in suburban settings outside Chicago. Her study focused on finding out more about the reasons that draw career-changers into teaching and the effects of a previous successful career on their development as teachers. She found that second-career teachers were motivated by altruism and the perceived personal benefits of teaching. She also found that second-career teachers "believe they offer valuable skills from their previous careers; new perspectives, including a commitment to helping students apply their knowledge to the real world" (p. 212).

Chambers (2002) also mentions Crow, Levine, and Nager's (1990) three categories of second-career teachers: "homecomers", "converted", and "unconverted". The "homecomers" are those who have entered a career they had always hoped to enter. This category shows some elements of similarity with Nieto's (2005) category of those who take the "long path". These are people who appeared to actively resist teaching despite others urging them to enter the profession because they would "make a good teacher" or would follow the family pattern of teaching as the preferred career choice. Those in this category need time to sort

out their career choices and either drift or make stop-gap measures while they make their own decisions. Crow et al.'s second category of "the converted" highlights those who reconsider their professional plans because of interactions with significant others or because of a particular event. The authors' remaining category of the "unconverted" teacher includes those who have become disenchanted after achieving high status in other occupations. Teaching for the second-career teachers in Chamber's study considered that teaching offered opportunities for personal growth, creativity, autonomy, and employment security.

Priyadharshini and Robinson-Pant (2003) offer further insight into the attractions of secondary teaching for those already established in other careers in Britain. In-depth interviews with teacher-trainees who had recently changed careers (N=34) allowed the participants to talk about their life decisions and choices, the strategies they used to enter teaching and their current experiences as teacher-trainees. The personal narratives produced a pattern of six different profiles for career-changers. These profiles were the "parent", the successful careerist, the freelancer, the late starter, the serial careerist, and the young career-changer. Reasons for switching careers were described in terms of "pulls and pushes". Priyadharshini and Robinson-Pant argue that "while the pushes were the factors that made them [the teachers] decide to quit their previous career, the pulls were those elements that made teaching an attractive proposition" (p. 100). Factors related to dissatisfaction include the need for greater stability and security, changing perspectives on life, memories and experiences of school, and a wish to use specialist subject knowledge.

A study of particular interest is one conducted by Johnson (2004) with first- and second-year teachers from among the 50 teachers involved in the Project on the Next Generation of Teachers in Massachusetts. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of early career teachers to determine what it was that led to teachers staying or leaving the teaching profession. In a smaller investigation within the larger study, Johnson and Birkeland (2003) highlighted that "teachers do not expect to teach for the long term; serial careers are the norm, and short-term employment is common. Therefore, the challenge of recruiting teachers to meet the shortage is unprecedented, in both nature and scope" (p. 585).

Thus, the main characteristics of these studies reveal that teaching is not a first career option for the majority of teachers. Entry is increasingly as a career-changer, as someone who has spent time in

other careers/jobs and does not necessarily see teaching as a long-term commitment but as one of many career choices. Heightened awareness of the factors that attract people to change their careers and to choose teaching is now clearly important for the continuing recruitment of teachers.

THE TEACHERS OF PROMISE STUDY

Rationale

The Teachers of Promise (TOPs) study explores the perceptions and experiences of a group of 57 New Zealand primary and secondary teachers judged to have the potential to become "strong" or "promising" teachers. Unlike other research focusing on these matters, this study includes the following features:

- It includes ITE;
- It is longitudinal, in that it is tracking (for five years) the experiences of early career teachers, even if they leave teaching;
- Its sample of teachers is cross-sector (i.e., primary and secondary);
- It is examining findings against the data from the study conducted by Johnson and the Project on the Next Generation of Teachers (2004);
- It includes rich data from semi-structured interviews;
- It provides contextual detail relating to teachers of promise in a New Zealand setting.

Teachers in their third year have completed two years of provisional registration and gained full teacher registration status. Targeting this group of teachers makes possible the collection of baseline data from these first two years and then more data as the teachers move through their next five years. This time-frame takes account of evidence that suggests learning in these early years is critical for developing the knowledge and skills of an "expert" teacher. Scherer (2001), for example, reports Berliner's (1995) contention that it takes five to eight years to master the craft of teaching and that initial teacher education "only takes you so far. It prepares you to be a beginner in a complex world" (p. 7).

Put simply, the focus for the TOPs study replicates the question asked by Nieto (2003) in America: Why is it that some teachers persevere with teaching while others lose heart and leave? Thus, the purposes of

the TOPs study are to record the stories of teachers, why they chose teaching, their pathways into teaching as either a first or second career, their time as provisionally registered teachers, and their perceptions of the teaching role over time.

Selection of "Teachers of Promise"

Identifying teacher effectiveness is complex. Selection of the sample of teachers with promise was similarly difficult because of wanting to explore the experiences of new teachers who would be likely to impact positively on students' learning. Before the education reforms in New Zealand in the late 1980s (Kelsey, 1997), all beginning teachers were monitored by school inspectors, who contributed to decisions about certification and ranked their capability as classroom teachers. Since implementation of the reforms, decisions about teacher capability have been the responsibility of individual schools. Principals attest to the New Zealand Teachers' Council at the end of their second year of provisional registration that each provisionally registered teacher has participated in an advice and guidance programme and met registration requirements. Given these developments, it seemed sensible to involve the employing schools and ITE institutions in the selection of the TOPs sample.

The first stage involved inviting programme directors from six ITE providers in five different cities to form an advisory group for the study. They represented four large institutions (two universities and two colleges of education) and two private institutions. The purpose of the meeting was to provide information about the proposed research, to contribute to the definition of the sample, and to ask for assistance in locating suitable research participants. Each representative agreed to consult within their respective institution to identify graduates who would be in their third year of teaching in 2005 and who they considered would be "likely to make a significant contribution to teaching and to children's and young persons' learning, and who were the kind of person whom others hope will remain in teaching."[2] The definition was intentionally broad to allow for professional predictions by initial teacher educators and confirmation as to current suitability provided by the principal or Head of Department in schools.

This information was used to create a "short list" of 80 teachers who, as a group, represented a range of ages, genders, backgrounds, ethnicities, ITE programmes, school types and geographical locations.

Phone calls were made to the school principals of the short-listed teachers. They were provided with a description of the research and asked if the suggested teachers were fulfilling their initial promise. If their inclusion was supported, a formal letter was sent to the teacher inviting them to participate in the research.

In general, the schools supported the providers' recommendations by saying "the right choice", "an absolute cracker", "the first person I thought of", "doing an amazing job", or "teachers like her are made in heaven". Nine possible participants were rejected by their employing schools who described them as being "a plodder", "unable to put the world on fire", "too much on their plate", or "issues with interpersonal skills". Others could not be located or were not actually in their third year of teaching. Overall, 57 teachers were invited to participate in the study and agreed to do so.

Characteristics of the Sample

The 57 teachers in the TOPs sample included 20 males and 37 females. Thirty-six teachers were under 30 years of age, 12 were 31 to 40 years of age, and nine were in the 41 to 50 age range. In terms of ethnicity, the sample included 47 Pakeha teachers, seven Maori, two Pasifika and one Asian. Teaching levels included 25 primary, 11 intermediate and 21 secondary schools. On the matter of career pathways, 22 teachers were first-career teachers, 25 were career-changers and 10 were engaged in other work not classified as a career. Further detail about the sample and its comparison with statistics of the general teaching population are available in the overview report of the TOPs project (Cameron, Baker, & Lovett, 2006).

Research Tools

The participating teachers agreed to ongoing contact throughout the five-year period of this longitudinal study so that comparisons could be made between their experiences in different schools in New Zealand, teaching in different countries, and, for those who leave teaching, their reasons for leaving and their subsequent career decisions. The data sourced for this article are drawn from two semi-structured interviews. These interviews have been transcribed in verbatim text and returned to the teachers for checking and approval to use quotes. Data analysis of the interviews has been ongoing and iterative. Analytic case studies have been constructed using key themes from the interviews and

relevant contextual information about the participants' schools from Education Review Office (ERO) reports available online to all schools.[3]

Questions in the first interview that relate to the study documented in this article were designed to enable the participating teachers to tell their stories of how they had made their decisions to enter careers in teaching. They were asked to recall important factors and events that had helped them make their decisions. For those choosing teaching as their first career, questions explored the other career options they had considered and why they had decided to reject those options. For the career-changers, questions asked for information about careers prior to teaching and the reasons for making changes. During the data analysis, the interview transcripts were initially sorted according to whether the teachers were first- or second-career entrants. The next analysis included tallies of the reasons for choosing teaching. These were set under the categories used in the Johnson (2004) study, that is, altruistic, intrinsic, extrinsic. The tallies also included personal characteristics such as age and gender. This replication of the Johnson analysis allowed for comparability with that study.

FINDINGS

Teaching as a "First Career" Choice

Several themes dominated the reasons given by those who chose teaching as their first career choice. These included the influence of family and friends in the decision to go teaching, genuine liking of children and wanting to make a worthwhile contribution to their lives, the personal challenges, and the rewards of pay and working conditions such as good holidays.

Teaching was the preferred career for eight of the first-career teachers who came from "families of teachers". These were families that had either one or both parents, a sibling or close relative in the teaching profession. These first-career teachers were therefore well aware of what teaching as a career entailed. Susan[4] recalled going into her mother's primary school class while she herself was a secondary student. She considered teaching was a fun career, and she liked the idea of making teaching resources and writing lesson plans.

Being surrounded by a family of teachers also meant that others assumed the next generation would also be teachers. Both of Jane's parents were teachers, yet had assumed a neutral position as their daughter grappled with her career decision. They said, "Oh we think

you would make a great teacher if you chose to do that, but you could do whatever you like and you would do well."

There were others in this group who were affirmed by the confidence friends had in their perceived ability to make a good teacher. This had led them to see teaching as a natural choice. Useful experiences were then gained through a range of activities, including church youth groups, babysitting, teacher-aiding and close contact with children.

Helping others learn was seen as particularly rewarding for several of this group. Gary said, "I love the teaching and learning process ... being able to share and provide information and for it to change someone's life so that they can experience more success." Ajay made a similar comment to indicate his enjoyment when working with children. He said, "I enjoyed communicating a message and seeing the light bulb switch on and seeing the kids make connections and feel like they were learning something new." He also mentioned other factors that added to this experience. These included having had a very positive experience of schooling himself where teachers had been caring individuals who had helped him to learn. He also thought that the starting wage and holidays were attractive, and his family endorsed these ideas about teaching as a possible career. Subject expertise in science was another deciding factor because he realized that he could help others to understand scientific concepts.

Inspirational role models had influenced four of these first-career entrants. For example Kirk wanted to find new and better ways to help children learn. Having benefited from his time at school himself, he was also aware that others had not been as fortunate. His mission therefore was to make schools a better place for others. Another member of the sample (Francesca) had been so entranced by the notion of teaching that she recalled watching the movie *To Sir with Love* 20 times.

Two of the sample (Emily and Isabella) expected teaching to open up other career opportunities. Emily had initially wanted to be a writer but had discounted this because it "lacked financial security". Isabella, although seeing the ways in which teaching had excited her sister, still saw teaching as a stepping-stone to something else.

Career-changers

Thirty-five of the TOPs sample entered teaching from other careers or jobs. The careers included journalism, sales and marketing, restaurant work, sports coaching, banking, trade apprenticeships and labouring,

consultancy work, graphic design, teacher aiding, and science or engineering and community work such as Sunday school teaching and babysitting.

Reasons for changing from these careers/jobs to teaching varied from wanting more personal autonomy, disillusionment with current job, the need for a creative outlet, a feeling of making a difference to others, and wanting a job with more meaning, challenge and a future. Twenty-one of these people had already had sufficient experience working with children to know that they liked working alongside youngsters and could relate to them with ease. Angela said her mother had told her she had the "Pied Piper syndrome". This was because, as a small girl, she had shown, as a natural organiser of activities, leadership of other children at weekend camps. For one male teacher, Gary, experience gained through church youth groups and communicating with children had given him sufficient baseline confidence to consider entering a teacher education programme. Seeing close friends or siblings enjoying their work as teachers helped three of this group to realise that teaching was something they themselves might usefully consider.

Leah had actively resisted teaching because both her parents were teachers. She initially had thought a career in teaching was "the easy way out" because it followed the family career pattern. However, with time, her attitude changed as she realised that she really needed a job that she considered more people-centred than her previous work experiences. She said, "I tried various jobs.... I had a job working in a library during which I ended up so bored that it was like I can't possibly have this kind of job from here on in. I need to have something that challenges me." She then decided to work as an artist, which she found was "about spending time alone and I realised that I needed to be around people.... The other option of [being] a graphic designer and [working] in a corporate sort of environment ... didn't push my buttons. I didn't care about making money from other people particularly." Sooner or later, she said, she needed to think about a long-term career that came with a decent salary.

Jack had met up with some friends in Thailand and had been persuaded to earn "a bit of pocket money" by teaching English before being formally trained. This experience had proved to be so enjoyable, it had lasted for three years. However, on returning to New Zealand, Jack clearly wanted to complete his degree and decided to embark on an ITE programme. Teaching appealed to him because of its level of challenge and interest. Other people were generally positive about this

career change and thought he would make a good teacher. His father thought teaching was a "good enough career" but wanted him to aim for something "a bit tougher". Jack was disappointed in this response but did not let it change his mind. He also said, "I'm not so driven about money and career success. I'm more driven by being successful with students, caring, going home and thinking, I've done some *good* things today."

Steven, who had considered teaching for several years, had actually made two attempts to enter teaching. The first time he had been accepted but had turned the offer down. His second attempt was with another ITE provider. He subsequently returned to teaching, having found retail work did not offer him a career pathway and the work conditions he wanted. It was dissatisfaction with retail that pushed him towards a career change and teaching.

Some of the teachers in the sample were attracted to teaching because of their parenting experiences. One father (Otautahi) had been on 14 school camps with his own children and had coached various sports teams. Despite having a job in banking that paid more than he could expect from teaching, he opted to drop salary to satisfy his quest for making a difference to students and their learning. Two others entered teaching because they believed they could make a difference to students and their learning. Kirk, who had not enjoyed his own schooling, wanted the next generation to make the most of any educational opportunities. Above all, he wanted the next generation to "feel good about themselves" and their place in the world. James had left school with no formal qualifications and similarly wanted to be a teacher for the same reason.

Another male, Sam, described himself as a "square peg in a round hole" in his first career and said it had taken years for him to realise that his "heart and passion" belonged in work with children rather than in the world of accounting. For years, he and his wife had been fostering at-risk youth and working with church youth groups so it was a matter of formalising this interest in teaching as a career. He admitted that he had always loved working with children, especially when this work involved educating and challenging them. David was also involved in church youth group work in his leisure-time. He said, "I was part of the kids' church at my church ... and I started going off to children's camps and really enjoyed and liked working with kids. That was when I sort of started to think about getting into teaching or something to do with working with children. So I got interested."

Experience as a teacher-aide in her son's class tempted one of the mothers in the sample (Claudia) to consider a career in teaching. She had enjoyed the relationships she had fostered with individual children and saw teaching as a job with a future. She had also reached the stage when she knew that she could work with larger groups of children rather than individual children. The thought of having the same holidays as her own children also appealed to her.

Others had taken what Nieto (2005) describes as the long road into teaching. One of these was Bridget, who had experienced a variety of jobs over 10 to 11 years before finally entering teaching. She described teaching as something that had "niggled away" as a career option until she had paid off her existing student loan. Strong resistance from her father towards higher education had made Bridget equally determined to continue her study, so she took on work in youth hostels, catering and museums and galleries to support herself. Later, when she married, the desire to become a "fully fledged teacher" was still with her, and she and her husband consciously saved money so that she could undertake a one-year teacher education programme.

Boredom in her previous career led Xanthe towards a career in teaching. She claimed to have never wanted to be a teacher but had been strongly influenced by her friends who she described as "high flyers". The experience of being in New York at the time of the September 11 bombing had been a life-changing event that led her towards formalising her teaching experience.

Disillusionment with a career as a scientist, especially one subjected to the uncertainty of government funding, had led Degz towards a new career in secondary teaching. While he was interested in becoming a tertiary lecturer and researcher, he was also realistic in knowing there were few job openings. The next best option seemed to be a career in secondary teaching. This appealed to him because he could use his general knowledge and impart "important facts and figures" to other people. He also felt that his prior experience as a scientist provided him with "a whole lot of stories of things that have gone wrong, things that have exploded and windows blowing out and all that sort of stuff that kids love to hear about." Dissatisfaction with jobs that had no future and lacked interest and challenge acted as a "pull" towards teaching for three others who respectively had first careers/jobs as an apprentice, a builder and a farm manager.

The need for more autonomy drove three from careers in journalism to teaching. Barrie had found many frustrations with getting a story to

print. He was attracted towards a career in teaching because it seemed to promise opportunities to help others and contribute to society. This decision was one that surprised many of his friends in the communication business.

Discussion and Implications

The TOPs data confirm that the New Zealand teachers of promise participating in the study were attracted to teaching for the same reasons as those identified in the international literature (Manuel & Hughes, 2006). Notions of enjoying working with children and making a difference to children's lives dominated in the reasons given for choosing teaching as a career. These confirm Cochran-Smith's (2004) comment, "Many enter teaching for idealistic reasons – they love children, they love learning, they imagine a world that is a better and more just place, and they want all children to have the chance to live and work productively in a democratic society" (p. 391). Such altruism was apparent in the decisions of both the first- and second-career teachers. Thus, many of these teachers had entered teaching having already had rewarding experiences working with children or young people. Sometimes the "pull" towards teaching resulted from dissatisfaction with a current job, as was the case for David working in the motor industry. In changing his career, he was able to build on the satisfaction he had experienced in his church work.

Despite concerns raised about the status of teachers already referred to in Kane & Mallon (2006), a third of the TOPs teachers had moved to a higher status job when they changed to teaching. For some, the status and rewards of the profession were secondary to their job satisfaction, as Jack's comment above intimated. The appeal of teaching as a caring profession dominated, as it had in the work of Chambers (2002) and Kyriacou and Coulthard (2000).

Negative experiences with other careers also made teaching an option. "Pull" factors such as perceiving teaching as a job with more variety and challenge than other careers attracted some of the TOPs teachers, as had been the case with the teachers in Bamby and Coe's (2004) study. Leah's prior experiences attest to the disillusionment with such work experiences. She is also an example of a TOPs teacher whose pathway to teaching had followed Nieto's (2003) "longer path"– as someone in the 31 to 40 age group entering teaching.

The total number of the career-changers (35) in the present study is larger than the number of the first-career teachers (22). These numbers

reflect an apparent trend for increasing numbers of people switching to teaching from other careers, a trend that has implications for recruitment and retention. While recruitment to teaching needs to continue to focus on school leavers, it must also take greater cognisance of those who have already experienced the workforce in other careers/jobs. This approach may require paying more attention to the factors that "pull" or "persuade" people to enter, as Priyadharshini and Robinson-Pant (2003) discuss. Portrayals of teaching and teachers' work need to show teaching as a potentially exciting and desirable profession. Advertising could give more emphasis to the satisfactions gained from making a difference to children's lives and future prospects as well as highlight the work conditions that might make teaching seem more attractive than other careers. More active valuing of teachers' work could occur through consideration of how improvements to the working conditions of teachers might appeal to a new generation of teachers; namely, smaller class sizes, better teaching resources and spaces, and increased professional development provisions, classroom release time and salaries.

Further research is needed to support our knowledge about what conditions might help retain teachers in the profession for the long term. In this regard, recent work by Berg (2005), Donaldson (2005) and Donaldson, Kirkpatrick, Marinell, Steele, Szczesiul, and Johnson (2005) on the development of second-stage teachers who have remained after their first two years, and are making decisions about how to develop their careers, warrant particular attention. These studies are informing the next phase of the TOPs project.

The findings of this present study suggest a need to look beyond the reasons that are conventionally seen as attracting people to take up teaching or deterring them from doing so. While these conventional reasons are important, the participants' comments, in line with recent literature, show there are aspects of the work of the teacher and the working conditions of the profession that hold strong promise for people seeking a first or subsequent career and that keep them in the profession once there. These aspects need to be highlighted in recruitment and retention policy and practice, and more emphasis paid to documenting the positive stories teachers have to tell of their work. As Mulford (2003) cautions, the teaching profession and those associated with recruitment into the profession need to be very careful that they do not "eat the seed corn", consuming what is needed to ensure the profession's future, by frightening off talented people from becoming

teachers and leaders in schools. Children and young people deserve teachers of promise.

Notes

1. This study is funded by the Ministry of Education through a purchase agreement with the New Zealand Council for Educational Research. Members of the research team are Marie Cameron (project leader), Robyn Baker (NZCER Director) and the author.
2. This definition was devised collaboratively by the advisory group of initial teacher educators.
3. The Education Review Office (ERO) reviews schools and early childhood services every three years and publishes national reports on current education practice.
4. Pseudonyms are used for the names of the participating teachers.

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