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## **Becoming a Teacher and Staying One: Examining the Complex Ecologies Associated With Educating and Retaining New Teachers in Rural Australia**

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*Abstract: The problem of teacher retention has intensified in Australia, particularly in rural areas, with a number of studies suggesting that beginning teachers are not entering the profession with a commitment to remaining there. This paper reports on a study of 102 new teachers graduating from a rural campus of a major Australian university. Utilising a self devised survey over a 3 year period, graduate reflections were captured on what it meant for them to become a teacher. The research sought to determine graduates' goals and aspirations for working in the profession in both the long and the short term. Participants reported that while they were looking for stability and would like to remain in their current positions, they were hampered by the present contractual system which eroded any sense of permanence. It is argued that contractual employment disrupts the development of a sense of belonging to the profession and the building of meaningful connections between teachers and their schools, a factor that will require attention if retention issues within rural Australia are to be seriously addressed.*

### **Introduction**

This research investigated the perceptions of new teacher graduates in rural Victoria as they began their careers in the teaching profession. It was anticipated that the data obtained in this study would clarify the perceptions of new teachers in relation to teaching as a long-term profession and add to the sparse body of research that exists specifically in relation to rural teachers in Australia. While the research was conducted in the state of Victoria, it is recognised that the issues are similar to those of the other Australian states indicating that much of the research in this field is national rather than state based. This paper reports on only a small section of a larger project which examined teachers' perceptions about how they learnt about the places and communities in which they began teaching (Somerville, Plunkett & Dyson, 2010). The survey developed for this three-year study included a section on goals and intentions about remaining in the profession, which provides the basis for this paper.

The initiation for the research was in response to a question posed by a local school principal about how to attract and retain new high quality teachers in Gippsland, which is part of regional Victoria, Australia. While it is conceded that not all teacher attrition is problematic, and in fact a certain level is desirable within the teaching profession, the issue of retaining beginning teachers is one that has caused concern in recent years both within Australia and internationally.

## Literature Review

Although Ingersoll (2001a, 2001b) found that teacher turnover was higher in teaching than in other professions, research by Harris and Adams (2007), Henke and Zahn (2001) and Stinebrickner (2002) produced different results, suggesting that teacher attrition rates were not dissimilar to those of comparable occupations. Unlike Ingersoll, the latter three studies compared only workers in the specific professions who were college graduates rather than the broader workforce. According to Harris & Adams (2007), “our results suggest that the average rate of teacher turnover is very close to similar professions, contrary to the conventional wisdom. It is slightly higher than that of nurses, but lower than accountants and social workers, even after controlling for various measurable differences among workers” (p. 336).

Yet it could be argued that the potential associated repercussions differ considerably for the teaching profession. In addition to the general productivity costs associated with staff turnover in any profession, there is the added concern of possible compromise of student learning. Recent research by Guarino, Santibañez, and Daley (2006) indicated that “attrition is generally costly to schools and may be detrimental to learning” (p. 186). Other negative implications that have been found as a result of a lack of teacher employment stability include high levels of uncertainty in educational settings and organizational instability (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003); impediments to school reform (Fullan, 2001); funding that could be spent on resources and facilities instead being directed into recruitment and replacement (Minarik, Thornton, & Perreault, 2003) and the loss of potentially excellent teachers (Podgursky, Monroe, & Watson, 2004). According to a recent study by Swars, Meyers, Mays and Lack (2009), the problem is one that needs to be taken seriously and “educators need to consider teacher turnover as an inherent and universal problem, where all teachers are at risk for leaving” (p.180).

The National Commission on Teaching and America’s future (2007) indicates that more than fifty per cent of those entering the profession will leave within the first 3-5 years. The Australian pattern appears to be very similar. Two recent national surveys illustrated the perceptions that beginning teachers have in relation to the longevity of a career in education. The first, conducted by the Australian Primary Principals Association (APPA), surveyed 1,351 beginning teachers and found that “although 93% of the survey respondents enjoy teaching, 24% indicate that they will be leaving the profession within 5 years” (APPA 2006, p. 8). Even more concerning, from a rural perspective, are the findings from a follow up

study by this Association, which suggests that 86% of respondents sought teaching positions in urban areas because of the lack of incentives to attract new teachers to rural areas (APPA, 2007). Another study by the Australian Education Union (AEU) surveyed 1200 beginning teachers and found that 45% did not intend to be teaching in 10 years time (AEU, 2006).

Internationally, a similar picture emerges, with Guarino *et al.*'s, (2006) review of recent empirical literature illustrating that "one very stable finding is that attrition is high for young or new teachers and lower for older or more experienced teachers until they reach ages at which retirement is feasible" (p. 185). Ingersoll and Smith, (2003) found that approximately one third of new teachers left the profession within their first 3 years and only 40% to 50% remained at the end of 5 years. Other studies have also highlighted the need for new ways of attracting and retaining new teachers, particularly in light of increasing levels of retirement as the teaching population ages (Ramsey, 2000; Ingersoll, 2001a, b). An interesting slant has arisen as a result of recent research indicating that the first three to five years of teaching involves significant factors which may impact on decisions to leave the profession. A study of 50 beginning teachers in Massachusetts found different approaches and attitudes between teachers who had commenced teaching in the 1960s and 1970s and the new generation of teachers, such that while some did expect education to be a long term career, few envisaged remaining in the classroom (Johnson, 2004).

The investigation of attitudes of the generation to which many new teachers belong has produced some interesting insights (Peske, Liu, Johnson, Kaauffman, & Kardos, 2001). Indeed the majority of the beginning teachers in this study (71%) belong to Generation Y. Defining a generation is an imprecise science but Gen Y is generally identified as those born between 1980 and 2000 (McCrindle, 2006; Wyn & Woodman, 2006). Henry (2006) suggests that "each generation has its own distinct set of values, view of authority, orientation to the world, sense of loyalty, and expectations of leaders and the work environment" (p. 5). The uncertainty and instability of working and family patterns suggests that young people have to work at creating long term relationships that may in the past have occurred through more stable and assured life patterns. According to Mackay, (1999) the present youth culture has "the desire to reconnect with 'the herd', [original emphasis] so that individuals obtain a stronger sense of identity and of emotional security from recreating communal connections that stimulate the 'village life' to which so many Australians aspire" (p. 3). Associated with, and directly related to, their education is Gen Y's understanding and concept of what leadership is, or should be, for them. They do not relate to traditional styles of leadership centred on 'the superior' or 'the adult' being in control. According to McCrindle (2006), "traditional leadership stresses structure, hierarchy and control - they are looking for relating, mentoring, and guidance....they want direction, feedback and good communication channels" (p. 5). However if the existing patterns of employment continue, this will not be what they receive.

In terms of more traditional analyses of reasons for teacher attrition, a substantive body of research has been developed suggesting that underlying contributing factors are many and varied. Swars *et al.*, (2009)

found “that the most common reasons related to teacher mobility were (a) finding a better teaching assignment (40%), (b) dissatisfaction with support from administrators (38%), and (c) dissatisfaction with workplace conditions (32%)” (p. 169). Other studies suggest relationships between attrition and teacher demographics including gender (Gritz & Theobold, 1996) and age (Adams, 1996; Ingersoll, 2001a); school and classroom factors generally (Ingersoll, 2001a; Podgursky *et al.*, 2004) and specific workplace conditions (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009).

With regard to workplace conditions, while not directly related to teaching, it was Pfeffer’s (1995) contention that employment security was one of the most significant factors in organisational success as it signalled the long-standing commitment of the organisation to its workforce. As such,

Norms of reciprocity tend to guarantee that this commitment is repaid, but conversely, an employer that signals through word and deed that its employees are dispensable is not likely to generate much loyalty, commitment or willingness to expend extra effort for the organisation’s benefit (p. 31).

In relation to the higher education sector, a study by Barnes and O’Hara (1999) argued that contractual status affected performance and reduced commitment. Within Australia, there is a dearth of research into the impact of employment conditions on teacher attrition or the practice of teaching yet research from the UK suggests

there is mounting evidence in England that rapid changes in the external and internal conditions of schools and the changing nature of teaching, similar to those articulated for the Australian context, have produced conditions of extreme uncertainty and identity crises within what historically has been for many teachers a stable profession (Day, Elliot & Kingston, 2005, p. 565).

An issue that has received little attention in the research is the current system utilised in many Australian Education Departments, involving a contract system whereby the employment of new teachers is mainly based on short term contracts (usually 12 months but can be as short as one school term). Contract teaching was introduced in 1993, creating a two-tier system within the schools. Contract teachers have no permanency—they are forced to repeatedly apply for their jobs. The Australian Teacher Education Union (2007) claim that attrition rates quoted in Annual Teacher Supply and Demand Reports do not include “the one in five teachers who are employed on a contract. They are not counted. Contract teachers are leaving the profession at a much higher rate - why should they stay? And it is in the governments interest that they not be included in the attrition rate”. According to Mary Bluett, Victorian Branch President of the AEU, “the level of contract employment is extremely discouraging for new entrants, and with less teachers delivering consistent education across the board, you have to question what effect this has on the quality of education students receive” (Bluett, 2007). The situation with regard to graduate positions is even more alarming with recent figures illustrating that less than one third (29.3%) of appointments under the Graduate Recruitment Program for Government schools in 2008 were for ongoing positions and over half of all appointments were 1 year contracts.

Ongoing appointments to non-metropolitan schools, under the program, were less common than to metropolitan schools and two thirds of all appointments to non-metropolitan schools were for 1 year or less (DEECD, 2008, p. 30).

The problem is further magnified in rural areas where there are major teacher shortages to begin with. For example in the rural area of Gippsland, where the current study was conducted, a recent report by the Teacher Supply and Demand Reference Group (Department of Education & Early Childhood Development, Vic, 2008) illustrated the significant problem of filling positions in schools, particularly those designated as 'hard to staff'. The report stated that while many non government schools paid above award salaries to attract teaching staff, in regional areas they experienced difficulties attracting suitable candidates since many teachers were reluctant to relocate to rural areas. In the year that this research project began, data provided by the Teacher Recruitment Census for 2006 indicated that 90 out of 151 schools in Gippsland responded that they had vacancies for the start of the school year, equating to 263 full Time equivalent (FTE) Teaching Service staff or an approximate shortfall of 20 percent (Howell, 2006). The situation had not improved by the final year of this project, with 2009 Census data reporting an even higher shortfall with 100 of the 149 responding schools having vacancies at the beginning of the 2009 school year, equating to 269 full time equivalent (FTE) vacancies for Teaching Service staff (Nieuwenhuizen, 2010). This ongoing shortage was occurring despite a yearly graduating population of approximately 100 primary teachers from the rural Gippsland campus of Monash University.

Within rural Australia there appears to be ongoing concerns about the current methods of attracting and retaining staff and with future predictions of projected national teacher shortages in many rural schools (Tomazin, 2010), it is timely to seek feedback from new graduates about how they perceive the teaching profession as a career choice in both the long and short term.

## Methodology

The survey instrument was specially designed to obtain descriptive data and some richer qualitative data using a range of open-ended questions. Graduating students of the Graduate Diploma of Education (Primary) or Bachelor of Education (Primary) in 2006, 2007 and 2008, who had left contact details, were sent a survey by mail with a return envelope. Approximately 310 students graduated over this 3 year period, not all of whom were contactable after graduation. Of the 250 surveys distributed, 102 valid responses were received, representing a 41% return rate. A further 16 responses were not used as they did not meet the criteria – either the graduate was not working as a teacher (7) or the survey was incomplete (9). Each year a sample of graduates were also invited to participate in an in-depth interview, resulting in approximately 30 interviews over the 3 year period. This paper concentrates on the open-ended survey responses as the interview data has already formed the basis of another publication (Somerville *et al.*, 2010).

The 101 survey responses resulted in a large amount of data, with surprisingly detailed written responses to the open-ended questions. This data was transcribed and then coded for analysis using the qualitative data analysis program NVivo7 and following guidelines proposed by Guba (1981) and then later Guba and Lincoln (1982) for meeting the criteria of trustworthiness as measures for validity and reliability. To ensure credibility, multiple analytical perspectives were utilised by the researchers with international colleagues acting as critical friends to confirm the accuracy of the conclusions drawn (Yin, 1994). Purposive sampling was employed to ensure the “context-relevant” nature of the sample (Guba, 1981, p. 86). Finally, steps were taken to increase the level of confirmability through multiple data collections over a three year period and the involvement of researchers and critical friends with different backgrounds and perspectives.

The initial analysis involved the establishment of general *tree* nodes and then more specific *child* nodes emerged as responses were further analysed and reclassified. This process was developed with the initial data set from 2006 graduates and then refined for the larger data set including the 2007 and 2008 cohorts. Despite the refinement, the themes generally remained constant as first outlined in Somerville *et al.*, (2010). Themes emerged as mainly categorical, using content analysis, which according to Berg (2007), involves “a careful, detailed, systematic examination and interpretation of a particular body of material in an effort to identify patterns, themes, biases, and meanings” (pp. 303 -304). After initial categories were chosen, the data set was sent to two colleagues for their input, with those categories that overlapped then forming the basis for thematic development. A similar process was conducted in relation to the quotes that were chosen as representative of each theme. A body of quotes for each category or theme were selected and then ranked according to a set of criteria, with the top five quotes for each theme highlighted for inclusion in publications. The criteria included a range of variables such as gender, age, locale and terminology used to ensure that quotes were as representative as possible of the range of respondents across the 3 years of the project. These processes which were developed in consultation with colleagues acting as critical friends helped to establish credibility and trustworthiness in the analysis of the data.

## Results & Discussion

### Background

Altogether 102 graduating teachers responded to the survey, 33 from the 2006 cohort, 36 from the 2007 cohort and 33 from the 2008 cohort. Eighty four percent of respondents were female, which is representative of the student cohort undertaking primary education courses at the campus and the primary school teaching population within Australia (ABS, 2009). The majority were young graduates, with 71% in the 20-29 years age bracket, while 18% were between 30-39 and 11% between 40-49 years of age. Just over half of respondents (51%) indicated they had been born in the Gippsland region, with 87% indicating they were living in Gippsland and

72% were teaching in Gippsland schools at the time of being surveyed. While this represents a substantial gain in terms of drawing people into the region for both residency and teaching, it is not clear how long they remain in the area, without reference to longitudinal data. The next stage for this project is to conduct follow-up research with the 102 participants to find out where they are in 2011.

Results for the next sections are presented utilising tables to provide a general picture of the frequency with which themes were mentioned but interspersed with commentary to highlight the nature of the responses within the emergent themes.

### Choosing and remaining at first school

Participants were asked why they had chosen to apply for their current positions and about their desire to remain there. According to Guarino *et al.*, (2006), the reasons for choosing to enter the teaching profession in the first place balance the practicalities with the esoteric and this was certainly evidenced in employment choices made by participants in the current study. Reasons provided were numerous and varied with many respondents listing more than one. Generally these fell into two main categories - the more pragmatic or logistical reasons such as locale or established connections with the school; or philosophical reasons such as the ethos/culture of the school. Interestingly it was the latter that made up the majority of responses (76%) to this question, as outlined in Table 1.

Themes: Why did you apply for this job?			No. of times mentioned
Philosophical milieu	Ethos	Community focus	14
		Size of school	18
		Ethos –religious/special needs/culture	26
	Relationships & connectedness	Already established a relationship with the school	22
		Positive relationships with community	16
		School had a good reputation	19
Logistics/pragmatics	Convenience	Close to home	13
		Had contacts there	10
	Vacancy existed	The position was advertised and a vacancy existed	12

Table 1: Reasons for applying for position

The following comments are illustrative of reasons graduates provided for applying for their current positions:

*“Because I live in the area and have had a lot of contact & involvement with the school, its staff members and students and felt that it was a very promising position”* (Ann, 2006).



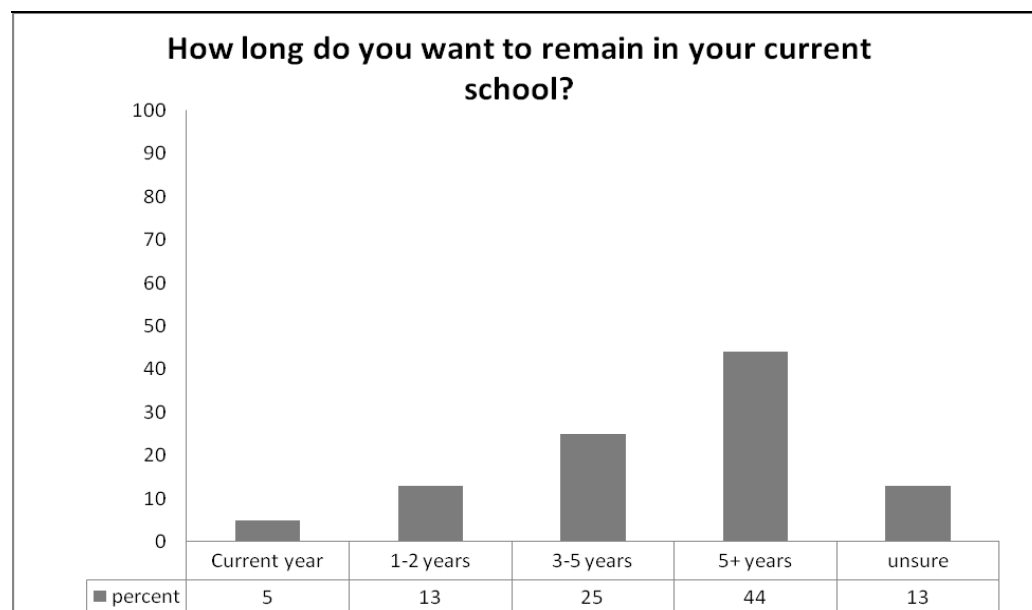
*“I was in the right place at the right time. The job was not advertised. It was more about who I knew, not what I knew” (James, 2007).*

*“I wanted a job in a Catholic primary school. It was an ongoing position and I felt like I needed to teach somewhere new and different from what I have experienced and am comfortable with in my home town” (Claire, 2008).*

*“Because it’s a small school in a country town with a big community focus. During prac I did placements in a small school and a large school and found a small school much more desirable” (Ian, 2008).*

*“I really liked the emphasis that was placed on acceptance or tolerance of difference – often this is missing in rural schools, or at least that’s what I’d previously thought” (Jan, 2007).*

In response to the question relating to how long they intended to stay in their current school, more than two thirds (69%) of the sample indicated that they would like to stay for at least 3 years and 44% of those for 5 years or more. Figure 1 illustrates the results which suggest that the majority of this cohort of graduates were looking for at least a reasonable period of stability in their initial years in the field, with only 18% indicating they intended to stay for 2 years or less in their current position and a further 13% unsure.



**Figure 1: Respondents intentions about length of stay in current school**

While these figures appear to support other Australian and international research suggesting teachers are not looking at teaching as a long term profession (APPA 2006, 2007; AEU 2006), it needs to be reiterated that this response only related to remaining in current positions, not to remaining in the profession, which is discussed later in this paper.

Interestingly, although the majority of respondents indicated a preference for remaining in current positions, it appears that the high level of ‘contract employment’ experienced was a disrupting factor in the process of becoming a teacher and the concomitant attachment to schools and communities in which these graduates began teaching. As outlined in the literature review, the sentiments expressed by both the AEU (2007) and

more specifically AEU spokesperson Mary Bluett (2007) in relation to fixed term contracts were echoed by the new teachers in this study. The impact of the contractual system was raised in each of the three cohorts, with almost half (45%) of respondents making specific reference to the associated negative aspects, including;

*"I feel it is very important to be connected to school but I feel contract works scares us into distancing ourselves in case we do not receive further employment there"* (Pauline, 2006)

*"It would be so much easier to make longer term plans about the direction I want to take in my teaching if I knew I was going to be here for more than 1 year"* (Mary, 2006)

*"Currently it is not possible to outline any long term career plans beyond each contract. This is an issue that requires further attention"* (John, 2007)

*"The issue of contracts is always there – I feel I can't really make any solid plans as there are no guarantees. I try to not let this impact on my teaching as I absolutely love my class/school etc but it must have some influence in the long run"* (Pam, 2008)

*"There is so much I want to do .. so many ideas....but I don't know where I will even be in 6 months if they don't renew {the contract} so I just take it day by day....what else can I do? At least a lot of others are also in the same position so it is not just me ... I know that sounds harsh but it makes me feel better"* (Paulo, 2008)

### **Future Directions: Short and long term goals**

Respondents were very forthcoming in their answers to this section and listed a number of goals for both the short and longer term. From the large list of responses, a number of themes emerged and these are outlined in Tables 2 & 3. Following each table is a representative sample of the associated comments made by respondents. Not surprisingly there was a degree of crossover between the long and short term goals of some respondents, while others were quite divergent. However, there was a definite pattern of an initial focus on consolidation rather than career building in the shorter term. This may help to explain the strong focus on short term contracts as the expectation may have been that it would not be as problematic in the longer term. This has potential repercussions because the opportunities for developing the positives associated with relationship building and connectedness that result from stable employment conditions (Pfeffer, 1995; Barnes & O'Hara, 1999), may still be undermined in the long term as contract employment is not solely restricted to new teachers.

Interestingly there was only one reference made to changing careers in the short term and that was by a student who had been unsure about their suitability for teaching but had decided to complete the course anyway, stating, *"I sort of knew after my first prac, that I didn't really want to be a teacher – it's funny because I've worked with kids so much in my career, so I knew what it was about and now I am wondering why I even contemplated going into a classroom"* (Sam, 2008). Although they did teach for a very short period of time, the return to their previous occupation

was seen to be enhanced by the knowledge and skills gained through the attainment of a teaching qualification, *“It will never go to waste [the teaching qualification] – I am definitely a lot more confident in my dealings with kids so while it cost me time and money, I gained a lot of other things that will help me so much in the future”*.

Themes: Short term goals			No. of times mentioned
Professional	Consolidating	Remain at current school	48
		Gain VIT accreditation	17
		Gain ongoing position	22
	Career building	Professional development	8
		Further study	8
		Different type of setting	4
		Leadership positions	4
		Principal	5
		Change career	1
Lifestyle	Movement (related to teaching)	Travel within Australia	6
		Travel overseas	6
	Family	Start a family or add to family	6

Table 2: Short term goals of participants

Many comments articulated a desire to stay in the one school for a period of time (at least 3 years) in order to build up skills and confidence – i.e. to help in the journey of becoming a teacher,

*“Get my teaching under control. When I’m more confident in this area start to experiment with ways of teaching that I am passionate about”* (Rae, 2008)

*“To stay at my current school and develop my skills to the highest level whilst providing the students the best education possible”* (Mike, 2007)

*“I want to make a difference in my student’ lives. I want to make them happy and keen to learn in the environment that I create for them at school”* (Jan, 2007)

Perhaps one of the most interesting comments was, *“to become a teacher – however I feel that this goal is still a long way off – perhaps it should be in my long term list* (Lisa, 2006). It is of interest to note from these comments that these beginning teachers did not appear to see themselves as complete in their role of *teacher* at this early stage in their career. A number indicated the need for further growth and development in order to hone their skills so that they could become the kind of teacher they aspired to be. This is consistent with research by Dyson and Hutchinson (2008) who found,

Despite the positive effect that powerful pre service teacher education programs can have on in-service teaching and subsequently quality education, no teacher education program can

equip a beginning teacher with everything they need to ‘know’, learn and ‘be’ in their role as a professional teacher (p. 47).

As expected there was an increased focus on career building in the articulation of the long term goals, with indications of a greater desire to specialise and take on leadership roles, although surprisingly only twelve participants (8 of them males) mentioned specifically working towards becoming a principal. Table 3 outlines the themes that emerged in relation to long term goals and is followed by some representative comments on those themes.

Themes: Long term goals			No. of times mentioned
Professional	Career modifications	Reduce to part time or CRT	6
		Change career	4
	Career building	Professional development	4
		Further study/specialisation	23
		Leadership positions	16
		Principal	12
Lifestyle	Movement (related to teaching)	Travel within Australia	9
		Travel overseas	12
	Family	Start a family or add to family	6

Table 3: Long term goals of participants

A number of comments indicated a desire to remain in the profession,

*“At the moment I think I will remain teaching in LV for many years to come, buying a house, having kids etc. I think teaching will definitely be a career I will stick with”* (Jenny, 2006)

*“I will return to work after children when the time is right. I love being a classroom teacher and I plan to do it forever. Can't see myself changing roles”* (Mary, 2008)

Others indicated a desire to return to study after a period of consolidation,

*“Further postgraduate studies – I definitely have academic aspirations”* (Paul, 2006)

*“Maybe one day I'd love to study again. As long as it didn't take over from the children I teach”* (Meg, 2008)

*“I plan on teaching for the rest of my working life. I am considering going back to uni to complete my Honours degree”* (Karen, 2007)

Interestingly, only 4 references were made to career change, suggesting an overall intention to remain in the profession in the longer term. This is not surprising due to the small amount of time respondents had spent in the profession and perhaps it could be viewed as concerning if many were already discussing career change alternatives at such an early

stage. However, this contrasts with much of the Gen Y literature suggesting that career change is high on the agenda (McCrindle, 2006).

One of the more interesting comments on this topic was from a male in the 2008 cohort who stated he wanted to *“stay in the profession as long as I am still enthusiastic and doing a good job for my kids. Work at a university doing teacher training or work with future teachers and then become Premier of Victoria”*

Other interesting comments included;

*“Following this (period in Melbourne), I will probably eventually end up back in Gippsland (you can take the girl out of the country but you can't take the country out of the girl)”* (Jill, 2008)

*“My long term goals are non-existent because I don't know if I will still be enjoying what I am doing. If not I will leave teaching. I prefer to take a short term view in relation to my career and just enjoy the moment.”* (Ben, 2008)

*“I have no idea until I have grown closer to the future”* (Con, 2007)

These comments illustrate the range of perspectives held by the participants, with each beginning teacher experiencing their entry to the profession from an individual lens, which makes it important to exercise caution with regard to broad generalisations. Nonetheless there were some commonalities particularly in relation to commitment to the profession in both the short and longer term, which have not always been evident in the research literature. Obviously the large emphasis placed on the contractual employment situation in Victoria indicated the level of concern for this practice, which has not previously been identified as a mitigating factor in teacher retention.

## Conclusion

Teacher retention is an issue that has been receiving more press both nationally and internationally and appears to be particularly problematic for rural areas, at least in the Australian context. While a level of attrition within the profession is both necessary and healthy, losing new teachers early in their career is neither desirable nor sustainable. In rural Victoria, Monash University's Gippsland campus graduates approximately 100 new primary teachers each year, most of whom choose to remain and teach in the area. In a three year study of new teachers, these graduates reported that they were not only keen to establish themselves in the profession, but to remain in it. Yet issues around the contractual nature of employment within Victoria, and particularly in regional areas were continually raised, suggesting that this is perceived as a disruptive influence in the development of connections between new teachers and their schools and ultimately their profession. This supports findings by both Barnes and O'Hara (1999) and Pfeffer (1995) regarding the unsettling influence of less than adequate employment conditions. If the contractual nature of employment is, as suggested by this study, hindering the development of relationship building and ultimately impacting on decisions to remain in the profession, then it is argued that there is a need for rethinking of current

processes if Education Departments are serious about meeting the challenges involved in educating and retaining teachers in rural Australia.

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