Career Motivations, Role Expectations and Curriculum Knowledge of Prospective Secondary English Teachers in Western Australia

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Abstract: Teacher quality, teaching standards, and entry criteria for teacher education courses are currently subjects of intense national debate and policy development in Australia. As tertiary institutions respond to calls for a review of standards, there is a need for more data on the characteristics of entrants to teacher education and the factors that are likely to influence their performance as teachers. This survey-based study investigated the entry characteristics of four cohorts of secondary English majors at one institution. Prior studies have focussed on graduate-level students in one-year preparation courses, and addressed fewer factors. This study surveyed undergraduate students embarking on a four-year degree, and included a wider survey of motivations, perceptions and abilities. The findings indicate participants had strong emotional investments but modest past achievement in secondary school English. They rated affective factors as more important for teaching than academic performance or intellectual ability; and they rated their own knowledge and skills in some key curriculum areas as marginal. These results are considered in relation to the debate on teaching standards and the capacity of undergraduate teacher education courses to prepare high quality teachers.

Introduction

Teacher quality, the effectiveness of teacher education programs, and admission standards for education courses are currently a focus of intense national debate and policy development in Australia. In recent years the Commonwealth government has initiated a number of inquiries and interventions on these topics. They include the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG) inquiry, and various initiatives of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). Simultaneously, the print media have made the status, recruitment and quality of teachers topics for regular commentary (for example, Bita 2015a; Buckingham 2014, 2015; Donnelly 2015; Hiatt 2015). The Australian Council of Deans of Education has also entered the debate, in defence of the selection processes used by Schools of Education and the quality of the teaching degrees they award (Australian Council of Deans of Education 2015).

These debates and initiatives have already effected changes within the tertiary sector and in school systems across Australia. The TEMAG inquiry has resulted in revised accreditation standards for tertiary Schools of Education, while the AITSL initiatives have produced mandatory Professional Standards for teachers and a plan to test the literacy and numeracy skills of all graduating teachers from 2016 (AITSL 2014, 2015). Most states have now phased out one-year Graduate Diploma courses for Initial Teacher Education (ITE), in

favour of two year Master of Teaching degrees for those with specialist undergraduate degrees. This has had the effect of magnifying the differences between graduate ITE programs, which now total five years of preparation, and undergraduate programs such as the Bachelor of Education, which require four years. The latter awards a single teaching degree, while the former award a three-year specialist degree plus a two-year Masters qualification.

These new initiatives, and the debates that precipitated them, have created a need for more current data on the characteristics of entrants to undergraduate ITE courses. This information is needed to shape recruitment strategies and improve course design in undergraduate teacher education, so as to attract the most suitable applicants into teaching and produce the most accomplished graduates. While a great deal of aggregate data has been assembled nationally about entrants to ITE courses, it is not always clear how institutions should interpret that data. The increasing market orientation of the tertiary sector in Australia means that ITE providers tap into specific demographics and tailor their courses to specific education sectors in their competition for students. It is therefore likely that the profiles and aptitudes of prospective students will differ across states, institutions, degree courses, and curriculum majors. This suggests a need for more localised and fine-grained investigations.

This study contributes data on the preparation of secondary teachers in Western Australia at the state's largest education provider. Our particular focus is on the entry characteristics of prospective English teachers in undergraduate ITE courses. This includes their educational backgrounds, their motivations for choosing English teaching as a career, their expectations of the teaching role, and their reflection on their own suitability for that role, in terms of relevant curriculum knowledge and skills. We make the assumption that these factors—motivations, expectations, and self-perceptions—play an important role in shaping career choice, in orienting new ITE students to their course of study and practicum experiences, and in helping shape their eventual teaching practice. That assumption is well supported by the literature on teacher motivations, identity and efficacy (for example, Bandura, 1997; Hebert, Lee & Williamson, 1998; Kyriacou & Coulthard 2000; Lortie, 1975; Reid & Caudwell, 1997; Spear, Gould & Lee, 2000). It is also an assumption found in prior studies of prospective English teachers (for example, Doecke, Loughran & Brown, 2000; Ewing & Smith, 2003; Manuel & Brindley 2005).

We take the view that English majors are an important cohort among teacher education students. English is a compulsory subject in Australian secondary schools, which means that teachers of English have contact with more students for more hours than is the case for other curriculum areas. They therefore have potentially greater influence on the attitudes and capabilities of students. English teachers in Australia are responsible for fostering habits of wide reading, literary appreciation and interpretation, and for teaching a variety of textual competencies related to fiction and non-fiction materials. Their work thus contributes to the effectiveness of the secondary school system in ways that extend beyond the specific goals and content of the English curriculum.

Teachers of English also have a particular role in relation to literacy standards in Australian schools. While responsibility for literacy is now shared much more equally among teachers, English specialists remain exemplars of style and usage within secondary schools and are expected to bring specific expertise to the teaching of topics such as English grammar. The special role of English teachers has not been entirely foreclosed by initiatives that encourage whole-of-school, cross-curricular approaches to literacy, such as the Western Australian Department of Education's successful *Stepping Out* professional development program (Bradley, 1996) and the Australian Curriculum's *General Capabilities* policy (ACARA 2012). The obligations of English teachers with regard to grammar and usage are now embedded in the official *Australian Curriculum* for English (ACARA 2015).

The capacity of English teachers to fulfil these obligations has recently been challenged. There is some evidence that the literacy standards of Australian secondary students are in decline, as measured by international benchmarks such as the OECD's PISA testing program (Thomson, De Bortoli & Buckley 2013). There has also been trenchant criticism, from some quarters, of an alleged decline in subject knowledge among English teachers—especially literary and historical knowledge (Bantick, 2014; Craven, 2014; Donnelly, 2007). For these reasons, it behoves tertiary schools of education to inquire closely into the abilities, motivations and capacities of those who choose English teaching as a career. If secondary English courses are to deliver value in proportion to their compulsory status within the school system, specialist English teachers must continue to meet high professional standards.

These issues form the context and set the parameters for this inquiry into the characteristics of undergraduate English majors in ITE courses.

Review of Literature
Teacher Quality and Selection Criteria

The literature on teacher quality, its impact on student outcomes, and the factors that predict teacher effectiveness is extensive. It is well established that teacher quality has a direct effect on student achievement (see, for example, Hattie, 2003, 2009; Hattie, Clinton, Thompson, & Schmidt-Davies, 1995; Ramsey, 2000; Rowe, 2003, 2004). It has been asserted that high performing classroom teachers can achieve in six months improvements in student outcomes that might take an underperforming teacher one or more years (Leigh 2010). Such dramatic impacts on student achievement underscore the need to select the best applicants for teaching and to offer them the best possible preparation.

Identifying the factors that predict teacher effectiveness is difficult, however. In the Australian context, much attention has been paid to the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) of prospective teachers, and its supposed predictive power. The ATAR is a cumulative, scaled score derived from a combination of school assessment and examination results in the final year of secondary schooling. Data show that the proportion of students entering teacher education with high ATARs has declined; and the proportion with ATARs below 50 has increased (Bita 2015a, 2015b; Ingvarson et al., 2014). This means that ITE courses are increasingly drawing from the lower quartiles of university entrants (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2003; Leigh & Ryan, 2008).

The decline in entry scores has fuelled concerns about the quality of students enrolling in ITE courses. Narrow dependence upon the ATAR as a selection criterion has recently been criticised, however. Although it is often used as a proxy measure of aptitude and future academic performance, the ATAR score is a measure of past achievement. It takes no account of the learning that will occur during a degree program, prior to a teacher's graduation. Further, there is some evidence that a high ATAR score is not in itself strongly predictive of success (Australian Council of Deans of Education 2015; Craven 2015). This uncertainty surrounding the ATAR entry score suggests that investigations of candidate aptitudes should focus on a broader range of factors (Australian Council of Deans of Education 2015; Bowles, Hattie, Dinham, Scull & Clinton, 2014). Bowles et al. argue that these factors should include past achievements, knowledge and ability, and social skills, in addition to a consideration of motivations and expectations.

Internationally, studies of the motivations and perceptions of beginning teachers are strikingly uniform in their findings. They consistently show that people choose teaching for a combination of affective, intrinsic and altruistic reasons, rather than for reasons of salary,

status, job security, or intellectual challenge (Brookhart & Freeman, 1992; Bullough & Hall-Kenyon, 2011; Calderhead & Robson, 1991; Ellis, 2003; Ewing & Smith, 2003; Heinz, 2015; Jarvis & Woodrow, 2005; Lortie, 1975; Maxon & Mahlios, 1994; Reid & Caudwell, 1997; Weinstein, 1989). The research also indicates that prospective teachers underestimate the academic requirements of the teaching role, emphasising instead the emotional and interpersonal dimensions (Prendergast, Garvis, & Keogh, 2011; Weinstein, 1989). Qualities of patience, empathy, and communication are valued over knowledge, expertise and professionalism.

Connections between identity, self-perception and teacher self-efficacy have also been established in research (Bandura, 1977; Prendergast, Garvis, & Keogh 2011; Sugrue, 1996, 1997). These studies suggest that prospective teachers are influenced in their practice by powerful emotional investments and theories of teaching formed during their own school experiences and encounters with teachers. Marland (2007), following the work of Lortie (1975) calls school experience an informal apprenticeship, while Sugrue (1996) refers to "lay theories" that shape the expectations, perceptions and subsequent practice of beginning teachers. The "lay theories" of beginning teachers have been found to contain naïve and idealised assumptions about students and teaching. Studies of teacher attrition in the early years after graduation show that challenges to these idealised expectations are a major cause of disenchantment and resignation, across all subject areas (Ewing & Smith, 2003; Gold, 1996; Manuel & Brindley, 2005; Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, 2002). Thus, there is a well-established body of knowledge suggesting that the motivations and assumptions of beginning teachers are influential in shaping their orientation to classroom practice, and that these factors may impact on the efficacy of beginning teachers and their longevity in the profession.

Motivations and Selection of English Specialists

Studies that focus specifically on English majors in secondary teacher education are fewer; but their findings are consistent with the theme of affective attraction to the profession, outlined above. In a longitudinal study comparing teacher education cohorts in Australian and the United Kingdom, Manuel & Brindley (2005) found English majors were motivated primarily by a passion for the subject, the desire for personal fulfilment, a wish to contribute to society, and ambition to work with children. Pragmatic and academic motivations were found to be much less significant: only 3% of respondents in the study ranked salary as a consideration, for instance; and only 4% nominated knowledge as an important pre-requisite. Ewing and Smith (2003) in a survey of education students at Sydney University likewise reported that themes of helping, caring and self-satisfaction were dominant in the motivations of their graduates.

Reid and Caudwell (1997), in a large questionnaire-based study of 453 Post-Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) students in the United Kingdom found that prospective Humanities/English teachers in their sample were drawn to teaching by factors such as powerful role models, the desire to share knowledge and to work with children, and the desire for a satisfying career. Jarvis & Woodrow (2005), in a follow-up study, used open ended questioning where Reid and Caudwell had offered preselected items. They canvassed 483 students, of whom 88 were English majors. They found that English majors were motivated primarily by love of the subject—in contrast to other subject majors who cited a desire to work with children, or the desire for a more challenging career. Likewise, Ellis (2003), in a study of 339 English majors, identified love of the subject and the desire to pursue their passions as the primary motivations.

These empirical findings are consistent with sociological and historicist discussions of the role and personalities of English teachers, found in the disciplines of English and Cultural Studies. The English teacher's embodiment of an "aesthetico-ethical" persona has long been recognised, as has the role of the English teacher as pastor and confidant within the school system (Baldick, 1983; Eagleton, 1985; Mathieson, 1975). More recent critiques have suggested that the English teacher's aesthetic and pastoral roles have been widely misunderstood, however, and their pedagogical function misconstrued (Donald, 1992; Hunter, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994a; Patterson, 1993, 2011). Such functions were originally strategic and pedagogical in purpose, not expressions of personal disposition. This misreading, the critics suggest, is an error that leads prospective English teachers to over-invest in the aesthetic, ethical and interpersonal aspects of English—evidence of which is provided by the studies cited above.

While drawing upon them, the present study differs in three important respects from the empirical studies cited above. First, it considers a broader range of beginning teacher characteristics than many of the cited studies, encompassing not only motivations for choosing teaching as a career, and perceptions of the teaching role, but also school background, and measures of confidence in important knowledge areas, as suggested by Bowles et al. (2014). Prior studies have typically addressed the first two factors (for example, Brookhart & Freeman, 1992; Bullough and Hall-Kenyon, 2011; Ellis, 2003; Ewing & Smith, 2003; Jarvis & Woodrow, 2005; Manuel & Brindley, 2005; Sugrue, 1997; Weinstein 1989); but none of those cited has the examined motivations and perceptions of teaching in conjunction with a reflection on the student's own school background and state of knowledge.

Second, this study is explicit in its focus on prospective teachers' perceptions of the role of intelligence, knowledge, and academic success in making an effective teacher of English. These items were not specifically included in studies that relied on open-ended response, including those by Ewing & Smith (2003), Jarvis & Woodrow (2005), and Manuel & Brindley (2005). This leaves open the possibility that they are under-reported or discounted in those studies, because participants might not have thought to list them as factors in their motivation to teach or their perception of teaching. Consideration of the beginning teacher's own school experience and knowledge also permits additional inferences to be drawn about the characteristics of those choosing to enter ITE courses as English majors. It might provide additional insights into their perception of the teaching role, their perceived suitability for it, and whether factors such as school background might be relevant in the recruitment of teachers. Our inclusion of these items also reflects a growing concern with the role of domain-specific knowledge as a potential predictor of efficacy, alongside general academic competence.

Third, the studies cited above surveyed PGCE and Graduate Diploma students in Australia and the United Kingdom. They do not provide data on students commencing undergraduate ITE courses straight from school. This raises questions about whether prior findings are applicable to school leavers. PGCE and Graduate Diploma courses enrol candidates who have completed specialist degrees and who often come to the profession in the context of a career change. Career change therefore features as a significant item in their responses; and they might take other factors for granted—such as subject knowledge. In contrast, this study focuses on entrants to undergraduate Bachelor of Education courses, most of whom are embarking on a first career, often as their first post-school experience. This introduces significant points of difference in the research. Lacking a completed subject degree, Bachelor of Education students are necessarily more reliant on their own high school English knowledge than are comparable Graduate Diploma students, especially during their first teaching practicum experiences. It is therefore of interest to ask how Bachelor of

Education students perceive their own content knowledge at the commencement of their degree, and how this relates to their perception of the English teacher's role.

By focussing on Bachelor of Education students, this study contributes new data that may be relevant to investigations of the viability of undergraduate ITE courses. The Bachelor of Education is a degree with limited content area specialisation. In Western Australia, Bachelor of Education students may take as few as eight content specialisation units for their major study, compared with twenty-four content units that make up a dedicated Bachelor's Degree. In the context of concerns about quality teaching, it must asked whether the undergraduate pathway is still appropriate for preparing specialist secondary teachers.

Method and Sample

This report presents data originally obtained for the purposes of student appraisal and course and unit planning at the target institution. The authors sought and obtained ethics approval to reanalyse these institutional surveys in the light of current concerns with admission standards, teacher preparation, and graduate quality.

Participants

The participants in the study were first year English majors enrolled in undergraduate Bachelor of Education programs at a major metropolitan School of Education in Western Australia. Four entering cohorts were selected, from the years 2009, 2011, 2013 and 2014. These were the years in which periodic surveys of course entrants were administered. A total of 71 completed surveys was obtained from this set of cohorts, representing 54% of the total enrolment. Within the sample, females accounted for 70.4% of the respondents, and males 29.6%. That gender balance is reflective of undergraduate English major cohorts generally, and of the teaching profession more broadly (McKenzie et al, 2014). The ages of participants were not recorded.

Individual ATAR scores for each of the survey participants are not known. However, it is known that the institution's entry score cut-offs over the years of the survey varied between 55 and 65. These would be considered low scores for tertiary entrance in the Australian context. The minimum entry score has been revised to 70 since the survey period, following the Commonwealth Government's TEMAG report and the announcement by AITSL of new literacy and numeracy testing initiatives for graduating teachers. It is also noteworthy that the cohorts in the sample exhibited a very high rate of attrition, averaging 36% across the four year program.

Survey Design

This was a survey-based study. The survey questionnaires contained a mix of closed and open questions, covering educational background, motivations for choosing English teaching, beliefs about and expectations of the profession, and self-reports of strengths and weaknesses in domain-specific knowledge and skills. A copy of the collection form is included in the Appendix.

Closed questions with multiple choice responses were used to elicit information about students' backgrounds, entry pathways, prior experience in English, motivations for choosing teaching, and perceptions of teacher attributes. These categories were based on a combination of preselected items drawn from prior studies, and from additional open-ended responses

solicited in an earlier version of the survey. To this initial set of items, new questions were added by the researchers. These additional items were prompted by professional curiosity and observed omissions in previous published studies. The additional items related to knowledge, intelligence, and artistic practice (writing and publication) as perceived pre-requisites for becoming an effective teacher of English.

Scalar items were used to elicit ratings of confidence in relation to domain specific knowledge and skills. Items in this section of the questionnaire were derived from the content of official Western Australian English curricula and syllabuses—that is, from the curricula that ITE students would be expected to teach during practicum placements and upon graduation. The original purpose of these items was to provide insights for course planning, so that areas of weakness or anxiety could be addressed within the course units that made up the degree program. In the context of this report, the data offer additional insight into the participant's estimation of their suitability for teaching and, by implication, insight into their expectations about the role of an English teacher.

All of the cohorts included in this study were surveyed using the same final form of the questionnaire, thus ensuring consistency in the data collection. The resulting pool of data was then interrogated in order to answer questions relevant to current debates about the recruitment of quality candidates for teaching, the characteristics of teacher education students, and the implications for teaching standards and teacher quality.

The central questions considered were these:
What factors influenced the selection of English teaching as a career?
What educational backgrounds and entry pathways were common among English majors?
What did candidates consider to be essential characteristics and capacities for teachers of secondary English?
What were the perceived areas of strength and weakness among candidates, in domain specific knowledge and skills?
How do these undergraduate ITE students in English differ, if at all, from previously surveyed graduate-level students reported in the literature?

Quantitative methods were used to answer these questions by means of simple counting techniques and tabulation of findings. This yielded numerical totals, percentages and correlations for the various items. The methodology in this current phase of the research is purely descriptive, the aim being primarily to sort and rank the various characteristics so as to build a portrait of the entry characteristics of teaching candidates. The nature of the data did not support deep statistical analysis. It was not possible, for example, to test the correlations between survey responses and graduation scores, or to undertake early-career interviews with the respondents, as the respondents have not been tracked through the course.

These questions and methods yielded observations about the motivations, role expectations and self-perceptions of prospective English teachers in the survey. We define motivations as those factors, both extrinsic and intrinsic, which a pre-service teacher regards as inciting, causing, or contributing to their career choice. This might include a wide range of factors such as love of the subject content, the influence of a role model or mentor, a desire to work with children, a recommendation from family or friends, an expectation of congenial working hours, or an expectation of job security. Of necessity, only conscious motivations are identified here, and only those conscious motivations which participants are prepared to declare. There may be unconscious and private motivating factors not captured in a survey such as this.

Role expectations are defined here as the set of beliefs that pre-service teachers hold about the work of English teachers and, by extension, the qualities presumed to equip them for that work. These expectations may be based on many factors, including observation of

their own teachers, association with or observation of teachers outside the school context (for example, family members or friends who are teachers), media representations, or imaginative extrapolations from these. As reported in the literature (for example, by Lortie, 1975; Marland, 2007; Sugrue, 1996), such expectations might vary widely in their accuracy and completeness. It is assumed here that such expectations play an important role in pre-service teachers' thinking about the work that teachers do, and in their orientation to the teaching role.

Perceptions of domain-specific knowledge are reports by the participants of perceived strengths and weaknesses in their command of the subject content. Because these abilities were not measured objectively in this study, they cannot be verified and so remain subjective. As noted above, such self-assessments are used here to shed additional light on students' expectations about the teaching role, and to reveal how their own perceived abilities align with those expectations. As subjective measures of confidence, they might or might not point to real variations in competence. Where additional evidence is available to confirm or contest the estimates of knowledge and skill (such as evidence from course assessment tasks and examination results) this is referred to in the Discussion.

Administration and Collection of Questionnaires

The questionnaires were completed anonymously by newly-enrolled English majors. The survey method involved direct administration of the questionnaires in classes, with an invitation to complete the forms voluntarily and submit them in person after class or to a staff mailbox. While participation was encouraged, submission of the completed form was voluntary. Participants were free to take the form away and submit it at a later time. This practice was designed to reduce any impression of coercion or intimidation, but also resulted in a lower rate of return than if all questionnaires had been collected in class. For those surveys that were submitted, the individual item response was high, with most surveys fully completed. The 71 surveys collected for analysis here were complete, meaning that every item was addressed to some extent.

Because the data were originally collected for course planning purposes, this reanalysis potentially raised some ethical issues, including the question of informed consent. In relation to such questions, it should be noted that all data collected in the original surveys was anonymous. Surveys were labelled by year of collection and degree course only. Further, use of the survey data in this research project is consistent with the original survey declaration, which stated: "This information will be used to help address your areas of need, in English curriculum classes, *and to build a clearer picture of the typical pre-service English teacher*." [Italics added]. The information in this report is aggregated and has not been broken down into year groups, thus preserving the anonymity of respondents, most of whom have now completed their courses. Given these facts, we suggest that reanalysing and publishing the data in this form involves no breach of trust or confidentiality.

Findings

Here we present tabulated data obtained from the survey forms, along with preliminary remarks on some of the findings. These data describe the school backgrounds, motivations, role expectations, and perceived knowledge and skills of the participants. The broader implications are considered more fully in the Discussion.

Educational Background and Entry Pathway

Table 1 records the immediate educational background of the surveyed undergraduates. From the table, it can be seen that school leavers who achieved an ATAR score made up half of the English major cohort (51%). The other half were non-school leavers who came to the course via a range of pathways, including completion of a University Preparation Course (UPC), or presentation of a portfolio of work. This picture appears to be odds with the assertion from the Australian Deans of Education that fewer than one in three education students are admitted via an ATAR score (Australian Council of Deans of Education 2015). That figure, however, includes students enrolling in Graduate Diploma and Master of Teaching courses, who have necessarily completed undergraduate degrees as a pre-requisite for entry. In the case of these undergraduates, school leavers with an ATAR were narrowly in the majority. That picture may differ across institutions.

The majority of students (52%) came from state government schools. Private school graduates accounted for 40%, with the remainder coming from Technical Education or trade backgrounds, or from other circumstances.

Secondary School Subject Selections

Perhaps surprisingly, only 30% of respondents had completed the Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE) course in Literature in their secondary school studies, with 70% taking WACE English instead. In Western Australia, Literature has previously been regarded as the more specialised (and perhaps more prestigious) of the English subjects offered at senior secondary level. This might have been due both to its narrow focus on the traditional Western canon and its association with the state's oldest university, the course having been developed originally to serve as a traditional matriculation subject. It might therefore be expected that passionate and capable English students would have taken Literature in greater numbers. A number of explanations for this apparent anomaly are possible. The first possibility is that past distinctions between the Literature and English courses are no longer valid, the course contents having converged greatly in recent years. A second is that students might choose their post-secondary career paths only after making their subject choices for secondary study. A third possibility is that those who chose to teach English were not among the strongest performers in the learning area (a possibility supported by other data that will be presented below). Some respondents indicated that they attempted Literature in year 11 but "dropped back" to English in Year 12.

Entry pathway		
School leaver with ATAR	36	(51%)
Adult entry / University Preparation Course	25	(35%)
Portfolio or other pathway	10	(14%)
Educational background (Highest level)		
WACE English Stage 2	15	(21%)
WACE English Stage 3	35	(49%)
WACE Literature Stage 2	0	
WACE Literature Stage 3	21	(30%)
Other	0	
Type of school attended		
Government secondary school	37	(52%)
Small independent school	4	(6%)
Large metro private school	24	(34%)

Home schooling	0	
TAFE	3	(4%)
Other	3	(4%)

**Table 1. Entry pathways and educational backgrounds of
surveyed undergraduate English majors. N=71.**

Students from private school backgrounds were more likely to have studied Literature than their state government school cohorts. Of the private school students, 39% had studied Literature, in contrast with 28% of government school students. Not all government schools offer the Literature course, however, which would explain some of the difference.

Motivation for Choosing Teaching

Ten motivations were recorded in the survey. As described above, these were derived from original open-ended questions and from items nominated by the researchers. Students were invited to rank motivations in importance from one (highest influence) to ten (lowest influence). Table 2 summarises the top five such rankings, showing how many students awarded each rank. (Many students did not rank more than five items, suggesting influences beyond that level were minimal.)

Personal interest was the most cited and most highly ranked motivation, with 62 respondents (87%) including it in their top five, and 29 (40%) ranking it number one. This was followed by the influence of an inspirational teacher, cited as a motivation by 54 respondents (76%), and ranked the number one motivation by 18 (25.3%). Love of the subject content was the third strongest influence, cited by 52 overall (73%), but ranked number one by only 6 (8%). Together, these three items accounted for over 74% of the top ranked influences on the survey.

Motivation	Rankings given on a five degree scale by 71 respondents				
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
Personal interest	29 (40.8%)	18 (25.3%)	3 (4.2%)	9 (12.7%)	3 (4.2%)
Inspired by a teacher	18 (25.3%)	14 (19.7%)	14 (19.7%)	6 (8.4%)	2 (2.8%)
Like the content	6 (8.4%)	12 (16.9%)	24 (33.8%)	7 (9.9%)	3 (4.2%)
Love of reading	3 (4.2%)	7 (9.9%)	6 (8.4%)	4 (5.6%)	4 (5.6%)
Work experience	4 (5.6%)	4 (5.6%)	1 (1.4%)	2 (2.8%)	0
Suggested by friend/family	1 (1.4%)	2 (2.8%)	6 (8.4%)	4 (5.6%)	0
High scores in English	1 (1.4%)	7 (9.9%)	6 (8.4%)	5 (7.0%)	4 (5.6%)
Not sure what else to do	1 (1.4%)	0	0	1 (1.4%)	1 (1.4%)
Seems like an easy job	2 (2.8%)	0	0	0	1 (1.4%)
Other	5 (7.0%)	1 (1.4%)	1 (1.4%)	0	0

Table 2. Motivations for teaching English, ranked on a five point scale. N=71.

In contrast with the most highly ranked motivations, past success at English ('Achieved high scores') did not emerge as a major influence. Although ranked in the top five by 23 respondents (32%), it was ranked number one by only a single respondent. This suggests that personal investment outweighed academic achievement as an influence on the decision to teach English—an observation that we will have occasion to return in the tables that follow, and in the discussion of the findings. Such findings are consistent with prior research on the motivations of teachers generally and English teachers in particular (see, for example, Brookhart & Freeman, 1992; Calderhead & Robson, 1991; Heinz, 2015, Manuel & Brindley, 2005; Reid & Caudwell, 1997; Weinstein, 1989).

Among the other motivations cited, but not itemised in Table 2, were the following: faith and calling (cited by two respondents), a desire to teach English overseas (cited by two), and favourable working hours for a mother (cited by one). These were nominated so rarely as to be considered outliers—though they may be more significant in cohorts elsewhere.

Role Expectations and Teacher Characteristics

This section of the survey asked participants what characteristics they believed were vital for a teacher of English. The question indirectly assessed the participant's expectations of the teaching role, since the choice of characteristics implies a set of assumptions about the work that English teachers do.

| Teacher Quality | Rankings given on a five degree scale by 71 respondents | | | | |
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
Strong content knowledge	26 (36.6%)	23 (32.4%)	9 (12.7%)	8 (11.3%)	1 (1.4%)
Love the subject content	26 (36.6%)	21 (29.6%)	10 (14.1%)	5 (7.0%)	4 (5.6%)
Desire to work with children	6 (8.4%)	12 (16.9%)	23 (32.4%)	19 (26.8%)	3 (4.2%)
Excellent communicator	12 (16.9%)	9 (12.7%)	13 (18.3%)	10 (14.1%)	6 (8.4%)
Right personality	4 (5.6%)	5 (7.0%)	8 (11.3%)	17 (23.9%)	3 (4.2%)
Broad general knowledge	0	0	4 (5.6%)	6 (8.4%)	6 (8.4%)
A high IQ	0	0	0	0	0
Published author	0	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0	0	0

Table 3. Perceived requirements for a teacher of English, ranked on a five point scale. N=71.

Eight characteristics were identified from initial survey and from items inserted by the researchers. Respondents were invited to rank these in order of importance, from one (most important) to ten (least important). Table 3 summarises the top five rankings. Not all participants ranked more than five items.

Strong content knowledge was the quality perceived as most relevant and important for a teacher of English, with 67 respondents (94%) including this in their ranking, and 26

(36.6%) ranking it number one. This was followed closely by love of the subject, ranked in the top five by 66 respondents (92%). A desire to work with children was seen as significant by 63 (88%), while communication skills were nominated by 50 (70%). At first glance these perceptions appear at odds with earlier studies, such as the survey by Manuel & Brindley (2005) of graduate English education students in Australia and the United Kingdom. Only 4% of participants in that study nominated content knowledge as a prime requirement.

Curiously, content knowledge was seen by respondents as unrelated to other items on the survey, such as general knowledge and intelligence. A broad general knowledge was seen as a requirement by only 16 respondents (22%) and was not ranked higher than third place by any respondent. Intelligence ('A high IQ') was not seen as a requirement for teaching English at all. It was not ranked in any position by a single respondent. Even granting that intelligence is a contested concept (and acknowledging that 'high IQ' is a somewhat ambiguous descriptor) it seems noteworthy that the capacity to teach the content and to communicate it effectively to children was seen as entirely unrelated to general intelligence and general knowledge. This is a point we discuss in more detail below.

Students from private school backgrounds appeared to have a more academic orientation to content. They rated strong content knowledge much higher than love of the content: 46% listed strong content as an essential quality, but only 25% listed love of the content. By contrast, students from state government schools rated love of the content higher than strong content knowledge: 47% ranked love of the content in first place, with 31% identifying strong knowledge as essential. Among students with a private school background, strong knowledge was rated higher than love of subject by a ratio of almost 2:1. For those with a state school background love of content rated higher than strong knowledge by a ratio of about 1.35:1. These differences might have implications for recruitment of teachers and marketing of teacher education, if it could be shown that orientation to knowledge was a determinant of effective teaching.

No respondent considered that being a published writer was a requirement, or even desirable, for a teacher of English. This is despite the special responsibility teachers of English have for teaching writing, in both expository and creative forms. It seems that English teachers were not perceived to be practitioners of an art outside of their school duties. While teachers of Visual Art might be expected to exhibit their works, it seems teachers of English were not expected to write and publish. This is a potentially disabling perception. There is evidence that the teaching of writing in schools has deviated markedly from real-world practice. The classroom models provided for genres such as the essay, for example, have been described as increasingly artificial and pedagogical, and unrepresentative of the output of real essayists (Gyenes & Wilks, 2014). That state of affairs can only be further entrenched if new teachers of English see no reason to write for real purposes beyond the classroom.

In combination, the findings reported above suggest that survey participants viewed the profession through a quite narrow set of expectations. In their view of teaching, emotional investment trumped academic knowledge and skill. Such assumptions were likely tied to the respondents' own school experience of English as a source of pleasure and self-affirmation. It appears that many chose to teach English because they liked the subject, but not necessarily because they were good at it. Emotional engagement and love of the subject are laudable qualities, but we suggest that emotional attachment is potentially a double-edged sword. While it might produce high levels of initial commitment and caring, it might ultimately limit classroom efficacy if it takes the place of intellectual and academic ability. It might also engender a sense of disillusionment among early-career teachers who find their emotional orientation to the job at odds with the administrative and bureaucratic aspects of teaching.

The narrowness of such perceptions also implied a reproductive view of teaching. For many respondents, teaching English meant teaching the English curriculum in the way their own teachers had taught. This would explain why knowledge of the subject content was seen as unrelated to general knowledge, intelligence, or professional achievement beyond the classroom. The respondent's perceptions reflected a school student's perspective on the work of teachers, which is limited to observations of classroom performance. Lacking an awareness of those dimensions of teaching that lie outside the classroom—acquisition of content knowledge, planning and preparation, strategic thinking, administration, and so on— these prospective teachers saw no need to consider the broader foundations of knowledge, skill and experience that might equip teachers to provide instruction in English. This is a point we return to in the Discussion below.

Perceptions of Domain-specific Knowledge and Skills

Participants were surveyed on their perceived areas of strength and weakness in English skills and content. This was an attempt to gain some insight into their domain-specific knowledge and skills, which may be more relevant indicators of initial teacher effectiveness than global proxies such as the ATAR score.

Sixteen curriculum topics were nominated on the survey. Respondents were asked to rank their degree of personal knowledge and confidence in relation to each topic on a five point scale, from Very Confident to Very Unsure. The listed items represent a broad cross section of the content and skills covered in Western Australian English curricula. Some attempt has been made to distinguish between processes and content in specific categories. For example, the two categories for feature film distinguish between the process of analysing individual film texts (which might be largely procedural), and formal knowledge of the medium and its history.

Table 4 summarises the ratings given by survey participants. Shading is used to indicate visually the distribution of confidence, with darker bands showing the highest totals and light areas the lowest. In this way, it is possible to see general patterns at a glance, and to compare easily the results for different curriculum topics.

Curriculum areas	Totalled rankings of confidence for each curriculum area				
	Very Confident	**Confident**	**Neutral**	**Unsure**	**Very Unsure**
Traditional literature	**3** (4.2%)	**25** (35.2%)	**22** (30.1%)	**12** (16.9%)	**5** (7.0%)
Literary history	**2** (2.8%)	**16** (22.5%)	**26** (36.6%)	**20** (28.2%)	**3** (4.2%)
Novels, author study	**8** (11.3%)	**46** (64.8%)	**9** (12.7%)	**4** (5.6%)	**0** (0%)
Poetry study	**7** (9.9%)	**22** (31.0%)	**20** (28.2%)	**14** (19.7%)	**4** (5.6%)
Drama study	**10** (14.1%)	**17** (23.9%)	**21** (29.6%)	**12** (16.9%)	**6** (8.4%)
Film/TV analysis	**17** (23.9%)	**29** (40.9%)	**16** (22.5%)	**3** (4.2%)	**1** (1.4%)
Film/TV history	**13** (18.3%)	**26** (36.6%)	**18** (25.3%)	**8** (11.3%)	**3** (4.2%)
Digital text	**8** (11.3%)	**13** (18.3%)	**21** (29.6%)	**18** (25.3%)	**8** (11.3%)

Visual text	**8** (11.3%)		**25** (35.2%)		**15** (21.1%)		**12** (16.9%)		**5** (7.0%)
Critical reading	**9** (12.7%)		**39** (54.9%)		**16** (22.5%)		**4** (5.6%)		**0** (0%)
Creative writing	**17** (23.9%)		**28** (39.4%)		**13** (18.3%)		**5** (7.0%)		**1** (1.4%)
Technical writing	**15** (21.1%)		**34** (47.9%)		**9** (12.7%)		**7** (9.9%)		**2** (2.8%)
Writing skills	**13** (18.3%)		**32** (45.0%)		**14** (19.7%)		**5** (7.0%)		**1** (1.4%)
English grammar	**6** (8.4%)		**24** (33.8%)		**21** (29.6%)		**8** (11.3%)		**1** (1.4%)
Oral performance	**17** (23.9%)		**29** (40.8%)		**11** (15.5%)		**10** (14.0%)		**1** (1.4%)
Oral literacy	**19** (26.8%)		**33** (46.5%)		**10** (14.0%)		**4** (5.6%)		**1** (1.4)

**Table 4. Totals of self-reported levels of confidence for aspects of English.
Darker bands show larger totals. N=71.**

In general, the picture is one of confidence overall. That is an encouraging outcome insofar as personal confidence correlates positively with teacher self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977; Hebert, Lee, & Williamson, 1998; Prendergast, Garvis, & Keogh, 2011). However, misplaced confidence is another matter. It can contribute to doubt and disillusionment if the beginning teacher's confidence is subsequently shattered; or to unfounded grandiosity, in the absence of a reality-check. Measures of confidence therefore need to be considered carefully.

While the levels of confidence reported were generally high, there were clear differences in perceived knowledge across the range of curriculum topics. Participants were much more confident of their capacity to analyse film and television texts (23.9% Very Confident) than to analyse poetry (9.9%), for example. In general, the participants were more confident engaging in processes with text (reading, analysing, discussing) and less confident in their knowledge of texts (knowing the history and conventions of text forms and genres). Likewise, they felt more confident with the processes of writing (23.9% were Very Confident in Creative Writing) than with knowing the technicalities of grammar and style (8.4%)—the legacy, perhaps, of a longstanding "process" emphasis in the teaching of writing in Australian schools.

The highest levels of confidence were in oral literacy (26.8% Very Confident) and oral performance (23.9%). If such self-assessments are accurate, this is a positive sign. One factor reported to correlate highly with classroom impact is the teacher's own verbal competence (Ehrenberg & Brewer, 1994; Mead & Leigh, 2005; Leigh, 2012; Leigh & Ryan 2008). It would therefore be hoped that teachers of English would score highly on this. To see oral competence rated so highly in relation to other important areas of the curriculum was a concern, however, for it pointed once again to a preference for process and performance over declarative knowledge.

Perhaps surprisingly, the respondents reported a significant lack of confidence with digital texts. Only 11.3% rated themselves Very Confident, and only 29.6% were Confident overall, leaving 59.1% Unsure or lacking confidence. This appears to be a striking counter to the claims of Prensky (2001) and others, that the so-called millennial generation are "digital natives" more comfortable with digital materials than with print. Even allowing that future teachers of English might exhibit a bias in favour of print literacy, the degree of unsureness with digital text stands out as noteworthy.

The patterns of confidence and uncertainty captured by the survey would likely not surprise experienced teachers of English or curriculum specialists. They broadly align with the emphases of modern school English. Indeed, if we make the assumption that students

entering an undergraduate course will be most confident with those topics that are most familiar to them, and which have been taught most thoroughly in English classes, then these ratings also serve as proxy measures of the biases and emphases of secondary school English. They might indicate what has been taught most frequently and extensively in schools. Taken as a whole, the ratings show an orientation toward creative, analytical and critical processes, and away from factual, historical and technical knowledge.

The perceived areas of strength and weakness become clearer when curriculum topics are ranked by reported level of confidence. Table 5 shows two such rankings. The first list ranks the items that attracted the most 'Very Confident' ratings. The second list ranks the items that attracted the most confident overall ratings ('Very confident' plus 'Confident'). This allows us to compare first-order confidence with overall confidence.

The two lists give similar rankings, with a few notable exceptions. Novel study ranked eleventh on the 'Very Confident' list, but ranked first on overall confidence. Very few respondents felt unsure about teaching novels; but equally few felt very confident. This seems to suggest a triumph of familiarity over knowledge and skill, as if novel study is a familiar but nevertheless somewhat mysterious process. Critical reading exhibited similar variability, ranked 9th and 4th respectively; while Drama/theatre studies dropped from 8th place to 14th, based on high levels of confidence among some students but great uncertainty among most. Literary history, poetry, and traditional literature stand out as significant areas of weakness and/or neglect—surely a concerning result from a sample of future teachers of English, who will carry special responsibility (in Western Australia) for teaching the specialist WACE Literature course.

Curriculum topics ranked by highest level confidence ('Very Confident' score only)			Curriculum topics ranked by overall confidence ('Very confident' + 'Confident' combined)		
Oral literacy	26.8%				
Creative writing	23.9%		Novels	76.0%	
Film/TV analysis		23.9%	Oral literacy	73.2%	
Oral performance	23.9%		Technical writing		69.0%
Technical writing		21.1%	Critical reading	67.6%	
Film/TV history	18.3%		Oral performance	64.8%	
Writing skills	18.3%		Film/TV analysis		64.8%
Drama/theatre studies	14.1%		Creative writing	63.4%	
Critical reading	12.7%		Writing skills	63.4%	
Digital text	11.3%		Film/TV history	54.9%	
Novels	11.3%		Visual texts	46.5%	
Visual texts	11.3%		English grammar	42.2%	
Poetry	9.9%		Poetry	40.8%	
English grammar	8.4%		Traditional literature	39.4%	
Traditional literature	4.2%		Drama/theatre studies	38.0%	
Literary history	2.8%		Digital text	29.6%	
			Literary history	24.3%	

**Table 5. Curriculum topics ranked by reported levels of confidence:
'Very confident' and 'Confident Overall.'**

It must be borne in mind that these data are based on self-reports and so are susceptible to the variety of distortions that go hand in hand with self-perception and self-definition. The ratings show reasonably high levels of confidence with technical writing, for instance; but there are reasons to suspect that such confidence is misplaced. Australian employers bemoan a lack of facility in technical writing among school leavers and university

graduates (Australian Industry Group, 2010; Industry Skills Council 2011); and the authors' experience with undergraduate English majors has taught us that very few have any grounding in the fundamentals of technical writing, such as clarity, conciseness, directness. It seems likely that participants construed "technical writing" to mean essays, which are the mainstay of senior school writing but an inadequate grounding in the skills of technical writing. It is difficult to rule on the accuracy of these self-reports without independent testing of the participants' knowledge and skills. Such testing was not included in this phase of the research, so the limitations of self-reporting must stand.

Self-developers, Carers, Transmitters

Within the overall picture offered by the data, a number of broad orientations are visible in the survey responses. We term these orientations *self-developers*, *knowledge transmitters*, and *carers*. For many respondents, the prime motivation for choosing to teach English was a desire to pursue their own love of the subject. Their interest was essentially self-directed. The majority of the surveyed cohort—approximately 48%—fell into this category, based on their declarations of personal interest and love of the subject content. Such self-developers evidently wished to sustain and prolong their engagement with a field of study to which they had strong affective ties, despite in some cases a history of only marginal performance. Some in this category expressed an interest in creative writing; a few declared themselves keen readers. They saw in English teaching an opportunity to pursue and develop these interests. The primary emphasis appeared to be an indulgence of their own passions and a desire to maintain their attachment to the experience of school English. This is consistent with reports in the literature on graduate and PGCE students.

Members of a second group saw themselves as future transmitters of knowledge and skills. They valued strong content knowledge and excellent communication skills as vital prerequisites for teaching. The few respondents who valued "broad general knowledge" also fell into this category. Their orientation to teaching was marginally more scholarly than those in the self-developer and carer groupings. Approximately 25% of the surveyed cohort could be described in this way. A smaller cohort—around 17%—could be classified as carers. Their motivation seemed to be inspiring and caring for others. These respondents gave high rankings to a desire to work with children, and to the importance of an English teacher having the "right personality." Some in this category nominated other motivations beyond those listed on the survey, including a desire to "make a difference," a sense of vocation, and for some an exercise of "faith' through service to others. For this group, the choice of English was perhaps dictated by their perception that it afforded the greatest opportunities for affirming the self-worth of students, for "making a difference to lives" as one respondent phrased it. These responses could be characterised as interpersonal and altruistic. Again, this is broadly consistent with prior studies.

The three categories were not sharply defined, however; and all fell within a broadly affective-inspirational conception of English teaching. Absent from the survey were any strong orientations toward academic excellence, intellectual rigour, technical proficiency and professionalism in the perceptions and motivation of the respondents. What might be called a "soft" view of English is in keeping with the aforementioned sociological observations (Hunter, 1991, 1993; Patterson 1993, 2011). Hunter describes the classic teacher of English as a "pastoral technician" who inhabits a specialised aesthetico-ethical persona, defined more by relational and pedagogical skills than by knowledge and expertise with the content. He warns that this "performed" persona is often misperceived as a personality type. This seems to be true of the participants in this survey. For them, love of the subject, an ethical perspective, self-affirmation, and affirmation of others were essential attributes for an English

teacher. They saw English not only as a field of knowledge but as a curriculum space set aside for specific kinds of aesthetic and ethical experience.

Discussion

In most respects, the findings of this survey align with observations from previous research into the characteristics of prospective English teachers, and with aggregate national data on entrants to ITE courses generally. As noted in the review of the literature, prospective teachers are reported to choose a teaching career for affective, intrinsic and altruistic reasons, and they are strongly influenced by their own school experience (Brookhart & Freeman, 1992; Calderhead & Robson, 1991; Sugrue, 1997; Weinstein, 1989). Those findings are equally true for the participants in this study, whose motivations are strongly tied to encounters with inspirational teachers (cited as an influence by 76%) and their love of English at school (cited by 87%). Likewise, the participants showed a tendency to value the affective and interpersonal aspects of teaching over the academic and intellectual aspects, as noted in the research of Ellis (2003), Ewing & Manuel (2005), Jarvis & Woodrow (2005), Manuel & Brindley (2005), Prendergast, Garvis & Keogh (2011), Sugrue (1997) and Weinstein (1989). Participants rated intelligence and general knowledge low on their list of essential requirements for teaching. Curriculum knowledge was rated highly, however, by 94% of participants, compared to a 92% rating for "love of subject."

These findings, we suggest, imply an orientation to teaching that is essentially reproductive. It is well established that pre-entry school experience serves as a (misleading) apprenticeship for beginning teachers (Lortie, 1975; Marland, 2007), furnishing them with role models, habits, and conceptions whose influence can be powerful and tenacious. Consistent with that thesis, the participants in this survey seem primed to re-enact the performance of their favourite teacher, who likely functions as an archetype on which they will model their professional identity (Calderhead & Robson, 1991; Heinz, 2015; Sugrue 1997). They likely imagine inspiring others and sharing their enthusiasm for the subject, thus reproducing and reinforcing the affective-aesthetic-interpersonal perception of English that defines the subject for them.

These general observations must be set against the background of broader trends and movements in education, especially the national concern about falling standards in Australian schools. As the status of teaching has declined in Australia, recruitment from the lower quartiles of achievement has grown. The proportion of alternative pathway entries into ITE courses has also increased. These changes do not inevitably mean that the quality of teaching graduates will fall. That assumption ignores the role and influence of university teacher education courses. But a change in the entering cohort and in the admissions standards poses a risk—especially when it is known that beginning teachers tend to teach as they themselves were taught in school, and not as they were taught to teach in their university courses (Calderhead & Robson, 1991; Sugrue 1997).

In that connection, a number of findings from the survey stand out as concerns. The first is the low estimation given to intelligence, general knowledge and academic success as prerequisites for effective teaching. While the respondents rated content knowledge very highly, it seems clear that they construe such knowledge narrowly to mean "curriculum knowledge." That a teacher's ability to master and teach the curriculum might be contingent upon broader knowledge, professional success outside of the classroom, and intelligence, was not acknowledged by these prospective teachers. Intelligence and professional success outside of teaching attracted no rating at all, while general knowledge was cited as important by only 23% of the sample. Such beliefs seem at odds with research suggesting that the best

predictor of teaching effectiveness is general intelligence and verbal competence (Mead & Leigh 2005).

There is a degree of self-serving in such beliefs, given that members of the sampled cohorts have not necessarily been high achievers at school. Only 11% of the respondents reported being motivated by high achievements in their own English studies, and only 30% studied the more demanding Literature course in their final years of schooling. A separate analysis of entry scores for the surveyed cohorts shows that at least six English majors had in fact failed English in their secondary schooling or in university preparation courses. This is consistent with the low minimum entry scores that prevailed in some years of the survey, with ATARS as low as 55. One survey respondent noted that he had "always struggled" with English, and so wanted to "make a difference" for other students. For a prospective teacher to construe weakness in his chosen field as a virtue illustrates the perception that teaching English is an affective and interpersonal endeavour rather than a scholarly or academic one.

A second observation that can be drawn from the data is that these prospective English teachers were most confident in those areas of the curriculum that emphasise process and performance rather than factual content or historical knowledge. Oral performance and creative writing stood out as areas of perceived strength; while literary history and study of traditional literary works emerged as topics of deep uncertainty (see Table 5). This is consistent with allegations of a hollowing out of the knowledge base of English in schools, in favour of generic skills and processes (Bantick, 2014; Craven, 2014; Donnelly, 2007). In supplementary surveys of their content knowledge, the same students were unable to place famous authors in a correct chronology, could not assign dates to figures such as Geoffrey Chaucer or Jane Austen, could not volunteer the names of two Australian poets, and were unable to give etymologies for words such as 'democracy' or 'astronaut.' They had little knowledge of standard rhetorical tropes beyond 'simile' and 'metaphor.' Such findings seemed to confirm the lack of formal knowledge implied in the survey responses.

In the light of such limited knowledge, the participants' professed confidence in topics such as novel study and critical analysis may well have been misplaced. Perceptive and detailed literary analysis depends upon the acquisition of wide ranging historical, biographical, textual and linguistic knowledge. But for the survey respondents it appears these tasks were seen as general processes rather than as occasions for the application of factual and empirical knowledge. Separate observations of classroom textual analysis show a modern tendency towards contentless procedural scanning for themes and issues rather than knowledge-based interpretation and judgment (Hunter 1991, 1994b; Moon 2001; Hirsch 2006). This is a debilitating trend which the prospective teachers in this study seem likely to embrace and perpetuate.

The same respondents also reported greater confidence with contemporary and familiar text forms (especially television and film) over traditional literary forms such as poetry, prose fiction and drama (see Tables 4 and 5). This suggests that for these students the secondary school English curriculum had not greatly extended their textual and interpretive horizons beyond the realm of contemporary media and text forms. However, as noted earlier, the professed lack of confidence with digital texts stands in opposition to that thesis. On the evidence of the survey, these English majors were likely to be digital rejecters. That suggests a potentially damaging combination of conservatism and historical ignorance: the respondents were simultaneously uncertain about innovative digital texts but relatively uninformed about traditional literary modes and chronologies. Their confidence was confined to the comfortable middle ground of the contemporary and the familiar: film, television, and oral performance.

The relative lack of confidence reported for knowledge of English grammar is also a concern. While a healthy 33.8% declared themselves Confident (Table 4), only 8.4% rated

themselves Very Confident, and 42.3% declared themselves less-than-confident (Neutral, Unsure and Very Unsure). This seems a disturbingly low figure for teaching candidates who had spent twelve years in a school system in which English is compulsory—and whose chosen field was English. Supplementary surveys of the same cohorts, not yet published, have shown that these reported levels of confidence are realistic, if not optimistic. Most of those tested could not explain the difference between simple, compound and complex sentences, the difference between concrete and abstract nouns, or the concept of subject-verb agreement. Usage of the colon and semi-colon was a topic of considerable confusion.

The picture that emerges from the survey of knowledge and skills shows a sample of prospective teachers with limited knowledge and limited textual experience. Their experience of mainstream experience of English left them lacking in skills and insights that might characterise high achieving students of English and Literature. The high achievers and prize winners were evidently choosing other career paths, other institutions, or other pathways into teaching.

Limitations

While the findings reported here will be of interest to those working in tertiary schools of education, to education policymakers, and to the English teaching profession, it must be acknowledged that the results are not widely generalizable. The characteristics of the cohorts surveyed here may be distinctive and even idiosyncratic, given the previously acknowledged segmentation of the tertiary education market in Australia. While national guidelines and standards exist that define the expected outcomes of teaching graduates, there is less consistency in the admission standards for teacher education courses. Additionally, the sample size and total number of responses reported here is small in relation to the total number of teachers graduated over the period of the survey—although it is a significant fraction of the number of secondary English teachers who graduated in the Western Australian context.

A project of this type necessarily suffers from the limitations inherent in self-reporting. Responses may be inaccurate for a variety of reasons, including misunderstanding of the survey items; inaccurate self-perception; a desire to avoid disclosure; or simple error in completing the survey items. These limitations will need to be borne in mind by anyone seeking to apply or interpret the findings.

Despite these limitations, the research provides a rich set of observations from which hypotheses for future research may be derived. The data should be regarded as a snapshot of the sampled cohorts, perhaps suggestive of common characteristics but not definitive of the wider population.

Implications

In 2014 the Australian Commonwealth Government's Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG) delivered its report, *Action now: classroom ready teachers* (Commonwealth Department of Education and Training, 2014). The primary theme of the report is that "Standards for . . . initial teacher education should be set high" (xiv). Among the report's specific recommendations is an injunction to recruit candidates with the highest potential:

Recommendation 10: Higher education providers select the best candidates into teaching using sophisticated approaches that ensure initial teacher education

> *students possess the required academic skills and personal characteristics to become a successful teacher. (xv)*

The findings of this survey, coupled with the observed high attrition rate in the course, raise some doubts as to whether the sampled cohorts represented the best candidates. While their emotional and aesthetic engagement with teaching was commendably strong, there are some doubts about their academic and domain-specific knowledge and skills, and about their perception of the teaching role and its requirements.

Whether the cohorts sampled in the survey are representative of undergraduate ITE entrants more broadly is unknown. For the target institution, and in other contexts where similar results are found, a number of implications can be drawn. One such implication is the need for the undergraduate ITE course to actively address and remediate deficits in the content knowledge and perceptions of its pre-service teachers. This may mean assessing more systematically the prior knowledge and abilities of new students upon entry, and tailoring degree units to address areas of identified need.

A second implication is the need to assess the alignment of undergraduate ITE courses with the curriculum and syllabus requirements of the school system in which graduates are likely to teach. In their self-reports, survey participants identified areas of the curriculum in which they lacked confidence and knowledge. This presumably reflected the emphases of their own English studies in school. If the subject is to be taught effectively, and the official syllabus delivered effectively, tertiary schools of education must offer course and unit combinations that address the curriculum demands—without necessarily being limited by them.

A third implication is that beginning teachers like those represented in the survey will need extensive preparation and support during school-based practicum placements that are likely to challenge their idealised conceptions of teaching. While this is an age-old issue in teaching, it may loom as a more significant challenge for recruits whose domain specific knowledge might be more tenuous than was the case for the generations that preceded them.

Finally, we suggest that the findings invite further research to investigate the relationships between the entry characteristics of undergraduate English majors, their graduation outcomes, and their early career experiences and longevity. Such longitudinal tracking is needed if the true influence of motivations, expectations, and domain knowledge is to be measured.

Conclusion

We have surveyed four cohorts of prospective secondary English teachers, upon their entry to undergraduate ITE courses at one institution. Our findings both confirm and extend existing knowledge about the motivations, expectations and perceived knowledge of English majors.

Undergraduate English majors in the survey were motivated primarily by affective and intrinsic factors rather than by the academic, scholarly or pragmatic attractions of teaching. They gained enjoyment and affirmation from their school experience of English, but were not necessarily high achievers. Most had studied English rather than Literature. They rated subject knowledge highly as a prerequisite for teaching English, but assigned little importance to general knowledge or intelligence. They saw no need for teachers of English to be successful arts practitioners in their own right.

With regard to domain-specific knowledge and skills, the participants rated themselves as generally confident about their capacity to teach English, but there were dramatic differences in those ratings across key areas of the English curriculum. They were

most confident with oral language skills and with general processes of reading and writing, less confident with factual knowledge and technical skills. They were least confident about teaching poetry, literary history, and digital texts.

The status of knowledge and the personal competence of prospective English teachers emerges from this survey as a significant point of interest. In conjunction with the other findings reported here it prompts questions about undergraduate degree programs with minimal subject content, and their capacity to produce high quality teachers from entrants who were moderate or low achievers in English.

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APPENDIX

Secondary English: Pre-Service Teacher Survey

The aim of this survey is to gather some information about your background, expectations of teaching, and confidence with the various aspects of high school English. The information collected here will be used to help address your areas of need in English Curriculum classes, and to build a clearer picture of the typical pre-service English teacher.

Your entry pathway
_____

☐ School leaver/ATAR   ☐ Adult entry / UPC   ☐ Portfolio or other pathway

Your educational background
_____

Which of the following did you study in your Secondary School/pre-University course? Tick all that apply, or add details.

☐ WACE English Stage 2   ☐ WACE Literature Stage 2
☐ WACE English Stage 3   ☐ WACE Literature Stage 3

☐ Other: ....

Which type of school did you attend for your senior secondary years?

☐ Government secondary school   ☐ Large metro private school
☐ Small independent school   ☐ Home schooling
☐ TAFE   ☐ Other: ....

Your motivation for choosing teaching
_____

Which of the following influenced your decision to become an English teacher? Please RANK those that apply (1, 2, 3, etc.), in order of importance. Leave an item blank if it is irrelevant. Add your own reason/s if needed.

__ Personal Interest (e.g. writing)   __ Suggested by family/friend
__ Inspired by a teacher   __ Achieved high scores in English
__ Like the content of English/Lit   __ Not sure what else to do
__ Love of reading   __ Seems like an easy job
__ Work experience   __ Other reason/s: ....

Which do you consider the most important requirement for a good teacher of English? Please RANK those that apply (1, 2, 3, etc.) in order of importance. Leave an item blank if it is irrelevant. Add your own items if needed.

__ The right personality   __ Broad general knowledge
__ Strong content knowledge   __ Love the subject content
__ Desire to work with children   __ High IQ
__ Excellent communicator   __ Other: ....
__ Is a published author   __ Other: ....

Your English content knowledge
_____

How confident and knowledgeable do you feel about each of the following areas of English, at this stage of your career?

Tick the appropriate point on the scale:

VERY CONFIDENT – CONFIDENT – NEUTRAL – UNSURE – VERY UNSURE

	VC	C	N	U	VU
Traditional literature (e.g. Shakespeare)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Literary history (major texts, authors, periods in Western literature)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Novels (traditional or modern, author study, text analysis)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Poetry (significant poets and poems, technical knowledge)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Drama (history of drama, major plays, theatre conventions)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Film /TV (analysing film/TV texts)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Film/TV (history of film/TV, genres, conventions)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Digital text and narrative (computer games, genres, conventions)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Visual texts (photographs, posters, picture books)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Critical reading (identifying values, attitudes in texts of all kinds)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Creative writing (writing original stories, poems)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Technical writing (essays, reports, articles, summaries)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Writing skills (controlling sentence types, word choice and punctuation for clarity and effect	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
English grammar (nouns, verbs, adjectives, grammar rules)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Oral performance (debates, formal speeches, presentations)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Oral literacy (general speaking, listening skills)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Thank you for completing the questionnaire.