Australian Journal of Teacher Education

Volume 45 | Issue 8 Article 5

2020

Teacher Crisis: Critical Events in the Mid-Career Stage

Katie Cawte
The University of Queensland

Follow this and additional works at: https://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte

Part of the Educational Administration and Supervision Commons, and the Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons

Recommended Citation
Cawte, K. (2020). Teacher Crisis: Critical Events in the Mid-Career Stage. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 45*(8).
http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2020v45n8.5

This Journal Article is posted at Research Online.
https://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/vol45/iss8/5

Teacher Crisis: Critical Events in the Mid-Career Stage

Katie Cawte
The University of Queensland

Abstract: To understand the ways in which teachers in the mid-career stage might be retained and maintained in the classroom and the profession, this article identifies the critical events in the journey of the mid-career teacher. The findings of a qualitative study that drew on narrative inquiry are used to explore the reasons why 20 mid-career teachers in Queensland, Australia, exited or remained in the classroom and/or profession. The article concludes with a profile of the mid-career teacher which helps to understand how to provide and/or develop job satisfaction and motivation and retain the knowledge, experience and skills of experienced teachers.

Introduction

As people progress through their working lives they pass through a number of stages as they develop, grow, reflect and mature in their careers. These stages form components or parts of an individual's overall career and are reflective of a person's changing attitudes, skills, knowledge and behaviours throughout their career (Lynn, 2002).

Teacher career stages that have been presented and discussed in the literature suggest that people in the teaching profession generally experience consistent or similar characteristics and patterns during their career journeys. The earliest interest in teacher career stages was by Ralph Fessler (1995) in the United States, Patricia Sikes (1985) in the United Kingdom and Michael Huberman (1993) in Switzerland. Huberman, Fessler and Sikes are key researchers who have provided the most comprehensive investigations into teacher career paths to date. Through their seminal research, these authors have presented frameworks or models that divide a teacher's career trajectory into stages or phases. Other additions to the teacher career literature include those by Steffy and Wolfe (2001) in the United States and Day et al. (2006) in the United Kingdom.

There are similarities across the models and stages proposed by the above authors; for example they all acknowledge that a teacher's career is essentially divided into three overarching career stages: early, mid and end of career stages. Within these career stages there is scope for other phases or components to become apparent. While there are many similarities across the models, there are also some important differences. The phases proposed by Huberman (1993) and Fessler (1995) are based on teachers' needs, attitudes and situations as they transition through their career stages. In contrast, Day et al.'s (2006) model is based on the number of years within the profession and within these years of experience, the level of teachers' self-efficacy. Sikes (1985), whose teacher career phases are based on a social-psychological understanding of adult development, based her model around the age groups of teachers. Steffy and Wolfe's (2001) model presents a series of stages that demonstrate teachers' acquisition and application of knowledge and skills throughout their careers.

The mid-career stage of teaching has been described as all of the following: a period of stabilisation or settling down (Huberman, 1993); the opportunity to experiment, grow and

diversify (Day et al., 2006); feelings of career frustration; and the time when teachers decide to stay or leave the classroom and/or the profession. A consistent theme across the literature is that during the mid-career stage employees are most likely to experience a career 'mid-life crisis'. Feelings of frustration, disillusionment and disengagement are particularly evident during this period if a mid-career teacher's needs are not met (Lusty, 2013; Rolls & Plauborg, 2009). As a consequence of these feelings, employees will often question the future direction of their career (Fessler, 1995). Fessler (1995) believes that the mid-career stage is a pivotal point in a teacher's career. It is during this time that teachers either continue to grow in the job, or instead experience frustration and instability (Rolls & Plauborg, 2009).

There appear to be two common motivators for teachers during the mid-career phase. First, as Williams and Fox (1995) claim, mid-career employees begin to place greater emphasis and value on factors such as family and lifestyle. Given that employees in the mid-career stage are typically 30 to 50 years of age, it is during this period that the decision is usually made to start a family (Sikes, 1985). As a result, an employee's commitments and responsibilities extend beyond their job which is no longer their sole focus or priority (Lusty, 2013). This differentiates mid-career teachers from early career teachers where the job is a large part of their lives (Lusty, 2013).

Second, teachers in the mid-career phase were found to be interested in pursuing positions of added responsibility at work as they have a desire to do something different or to pursue a new challenge (Fessler, 1995). These motivations are sometimes, but not always, linked to the first motivator - starting a family. For example, with increased family responsibilities and financial commitments, there is often a need for a higher income to support these changes.

Furthermore, employees in the mid-career phase become more focused on their long-term goals and look for opportunities for future development or redirection (Williams & Fox, 1995). When there is little opportunity for advancement, mid-career teachers often experience tension and motivational challenges (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). This is when teachers can become frustrated in their careers and can experience a 'mid-career crisis'.

The teaching profession still has a 'traditional' career progression structure, in that there are limited opportunities for progressing higher. The main career pathways in teaching are either to remain as a classroom teacher, or to pursue a management position, which eventually leads to the position of deputy principal or principal (Ingvarson & Chadbourne, 1997). The main criticism with management positions in education is that they usually mean less contact time with students, and therefore are a different type of job and do not necessarily contain the elements that initially drew the person to a career in teaching (McCreight, 2000).

Career frustration often reflects a lack of job satisfaction (Lynn, 2002). In a 2012 Metropolitan Life survey of American teachers, it was found that mid-career teachers are more likely to experience lower levels of job satisfaction compared to teachers in other career stages (MetLife, 2013). According to Ellis (1984), teachers who hold positions with enriched characteristics may be considerably more motivated than their counterparts. Holmes and Cartwright (1994) suggested that the desire for a new challenge can be a reason that prompts mid-career employees to consider a career change. The life cycle model for teachers' careers proposed by Steffy and Wolfe (2001) suggests that if mid-career teachers are to move past the 'mid-life crisis' feeling, then they need to be offered opportunities for reflection, renewal and growth. Further understanding of what provides satisfaction and motivation for mid-career teachers, in light of contextual factors, is an important part of understanding how to retain these teachers. Therefore, this study attempted to investigate this further.

The literature exploring why mid-career teachers leave and, more importantly, how to retain teachers in the middle stages of their career, is limited. Rolls and Plauborg (2009) have

noted that previous research on mid-career teachers has mainly focused on why these teachers consider leaving or has investigated the feelings and emotions during their 'mid-career crisis'. This only provides one part of the answer, or as Ingersoll (2001, 2002) argued, the symptom not the problem. To capture the full continuum of attrition and retention, research must also explore the reasons why they stay. With the challenges relating to teacher retention and the growing need to provide continued professional development for teachers, this study explored not only why mid-career teachers leave, but also, why they stay?

In order to learn how best to retain teachers, it is important that their voices are heard through their career stories and experiences. Criticisms of the teacher career models by Huberman (1993), Sikes (1985) and Day et al. (2006) are that they are static in nature and suggest that teachers move through their career in a linear direction (Rolls & Plauborg, 2009). It is important to explore how the current teaching context in Australia plays a role in influencing their career journeys. This study attempted to address the gap that Rolls and Plauborg (2009) identified for future research, which is to re-evaluate, or re-investigate the way that teachers move through their careers. Maslow's hierarchy of needs was used as a theoretical lens to understand the decisions made by mid-career teachers during their teaching journey.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs as a Conceptual Framework

Maslow's hierarchy of needs was adopted as the theoretical framework through which the findings of this research were analysed. Maslow's theory of motivation proposed that employees are motivated to satisfy five types of needs: physiological; safety; social; esteem and self-actualisation (Fig. 1). These five needs are ordered in a hierarchy of importance, where lower order needs must be met or satisfied before the next higher order needs can motivate behaviour (Fisher & Royster, 2016; Schulte, 2018). According to Maslow (1954), once an employee satisfies a particular need, that need may no longer act as a source of motivation for employee behaviour. Needs are motivators only when they are unsatisfied. In 1969, Maslow created a sixth level of need beyond self-actualisation which became known as self-transcendence (Koltko-Rivera, 2006).

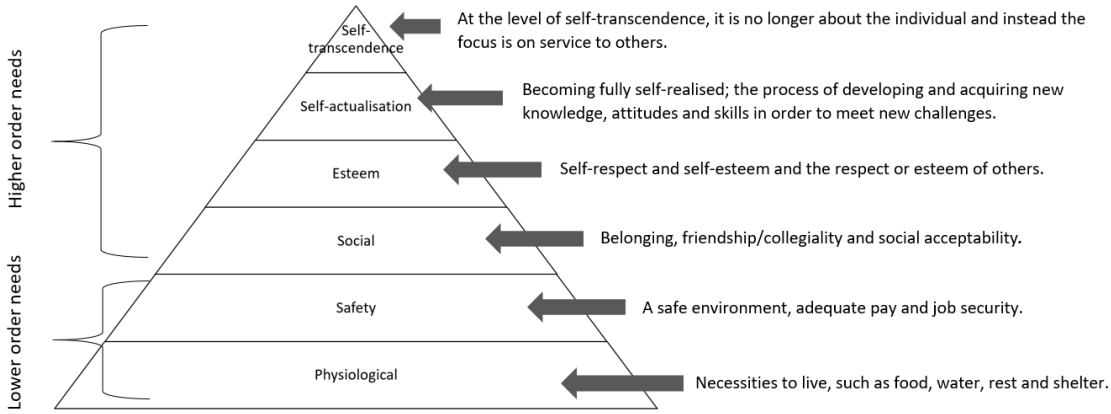

Figure 1: Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The pyramid illustrates the hierarchical order of the six levels of needs proposed by Maslow.

Whilst Maslow's hierarchy of needs has been used in educational literature to explain the motivations of beginning teachers and teachers in general, this study focused on

investigating how the hierarchy of needs specifically reflects and frames the needs and motivations of mid-career teachers in Australia.

Methodology and Methods

As little is currently known about Australian mid-career teachers in relation to their retention, development and career progression, a social constructivist approach helped to construct new knowledge in these areas. As Schwandt (1994, p.125) stated, constructivists "… invent concepts, models and schemes to make sense of experience…" It was anticipated that through the exploration of the career journeys of mid-career teachers, a collective generation of meaning would allow for the construction of a profile to help understand this particular group of teachers in more nuanced ways.

To understand and explore the factors that influence teachers to stay in or leave the classroom or the profession, this qualitative study used a method of narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry is based on human stories (Pinnegar and Daynes, 2007) and "provides researchers with a rich framework for which they can investigate the ways humans experience the world depicted through their stories" (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 3). This method is particularly helpful in terms of understanding and communicating new ideas, which is consistent with a social constructivist approach. Narrative inquiry provides an important tool to 'unpack' teachers' experiences and the data produced – the voices of mid-career teachers - can therefore provide new insights into these experiences for the teaching profession (Clandinin and Caine, 2013). Indeed, stories have been recognised as very powerful tools to develop understandings of teaching and teaching contexts (Clandinin and Caine, 2013). As Elbaz-Luwisch (2007, p. 358) stated, "Understanding teaching requires that we pay attention to teachers both as individuals and as a group, listening to their voices and the stories they tell about their work and their lives". The aim of this study was to gain more nuanced understanding of the teachers' perspectives in the area of teacher job motivation and retention.

The Participants

In order to investigate why teachers in the mid-career stage stay in or leave classroom teaching and the profession, 20 teachers who fit the 'mid-career' criteria were approached to participate in this study. A 'mid-career teacher' was defined as a teacher with a minimum of seven years and a maximum of 20 years of teaching experience. "Teaching experience" refers to teachers who have had experience teaching in a classroom. Teachers were selected based on their ability to satisfy a cross section of three specific categories (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). These categories were created from the pathways that participants had chosen in their teaching journeys.

The first category of participants consisted of those teachers who had chosen to remain in the classroom. This allowed the researcher to ask questions that provided responses on what motivated these particular participants to remain in the classroom. A further point of investigation was to determine whether or not programs or initiatives existed in the participants' schools that perhaps influenced their decision to remain as classroom teachers. The second category of participants was comprised of teachers who had moved from the classroom to middle management/leadership positions in their schools. The motivation of these participants to take on more administrative duties in addition to their classroom teaching – and in some cases, leave the classroom entirely – was explored. The third category

of participants included those teachers who had left the profession. These teachers were either classroom teachers or middle managers at the point of their departure from the profession. The specific focus with these participants was on issues and factors relating to attrition and retention. In order to address the issue of attrition, it was essential to investigate what motivated them to leave the profession. It was found that participants within categories one and two also displayed intentions to leave the profession, therefore the reasons for their consideration of this option were explored. Table 1 provides an overview of the participants who participated in the study.

Teacher Number	Gender	Length of time teaching	Teaching Experience	Teaching Positions	Still in the profession	Still in the classroom
1	Female	7 years	- State	- Classroom teacher - Acting head of department	No	No
2	Female	15 years	- Non-state - Overseas	- Classroom teacher	Yes	Yes
3	Female	16 years	- State - Non-state - Interstate	- Classroom teacher - Head of department - Acting Dean	Yes	No
4	Female	15 years	- Non-state - Overseas	- Classroom teacher - Head of house	Yes	No
5	Male	13 years	- State - Non-state	- Classroom teacher	Yes	Yes
6	Female	13 years	- State - Non-state	- Classroom teacher - Head of department	No	No
7	Female	12 years	- State - Non-state - Overseas	- Classroom teacher - Year level coordinator - Head of department	Yes	No
8	Female	7 years	- Overseas	- Classroom teacher - Head of department	No	No
9	Male	9 years	- Non-state - Overseas	- Classroom teacher - Acting Head of house - Acting head of department	Yes	Yes
10	Female	16 years	- State - Non-state - Overseas	- Classroom teacher - Year level coordinator - Head of department	No	No
11	Female	18 years	- State - Non-state - Overseas	- Classroom teacher - Dean	Yes	No
12	Female	8.5 years	- Non-state - Overseas	- Classroom teacher - Year level coordinator - Head of department	No	No
13	Female	14 years	- State - Non-state - Interstate	- Classroom teacher - Head of department	Yes	Yes
14	Male	14 years	- State	- Classroom teacher - Head of department	Yes	Yes
15	Female	16 years	- State	- Classroom teacher - Head of department	Yes	Yes
16	Male	18 years	- State	- Classroom teacher - Head of department - Deputy Principal - Principal	Yes	No
17	Male	15 years	- Non-state - Interstate	- Classroom teacher - Year level coordinator	Yes	No
18	Male	15 years	- State - Overseas	- Classroom teacher	Yes	Yes
19	Female	13 years	- State - Non-state	- Classroom teacher - Head of department	Yes	Yes
20	Female	12 years	- Non-state	- Classroom teacher - Year level coordinator	Yes	Yes

Table 1: The Participants

The selection of participants aimed to include a balance of teachers in terms of their gender, and from both the state and non-state sectors in Queensland, Australia, so as to provide a more realistic and representative sample of teachers. All participants were within the 30-45 age bracket. The teaching experience of participants ranged from seven to 18 years

and spanned state, non-state, interstate (states and territories within Australia), and international educational systems and included participants from both primary and secondary schools. All participants gave informed consent and ethics approval was granted by the institutional ethics committee.

Research Methods

A semi-structured interview format was chosen for this research because it allowed for an in-depth examination of people and topics (Minichiello et al., 1995) and was therefore well suited to exploring the stories and experiences of mid-career teachers. Eight interview questions were formulated around the main research question and the two guiding questions. Figure 2 outlines the eight interview questions.

Whilst all participants were asked the same eight questions, the "fluid and flexible" structure of the semi-structured interview meant that unexpected themes could be explored during the interview (Mason, 2002, p. 62).

General

1. Briefly share your teaching journey (i.e. length of time teaching, why and how you got into teaching, positions held, number of schools worked in, etc.).

Teachers' Work

2. Explain the duties and responsibilities you believe are involved in being an effective teacher.
3. How have these duties and responsibilities changed since you first began teaching? And what effect/impacts (if any) do you believe they have had on teaching?

Job Satisfaction

4. Identify and explain factors in teaching that provide job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction for you. Provide specific examples, stories or situations.

Job Motivation

5. Identify and explain short-term and long-term factors that provide motivation for you. Provide specific examples, stories or situations.

Career Progression

6. Comment on the career progression pathways that are available for teachers (i.e. at your school and in the profession generally).
7. What are some recommendations/suggestions you believe would help to keep experienced teachers in the classroom?

Retention

8. Have you ever left, or considered leaving teaching? If yes, why? If no, why not?

Figure 2: The schedule of interview questions

The first technique for analysing the data involved the use of coding to identify key themes within the interview data. The process of inductive analysis allowed for the identification of patterns, themes and categories that emerged across the data (Patton, 2002). Thirty-two codes were initially identified during the analysis process. These codes were then further distilled into overarching categories and then into main concepts. The creation of the final five themes was influenced by both key topics in the literature and recurring points reflected through the interviews. The five key themes identified were: teachers' work; job

satisfaction; job motivation; retention; and career progression.

The second technique for analysing the data was the identification of critical events common to the mid-career teachers in this study. During the process of thematic analysis a number of recurring events were identified across the participants. These events were considered to be influential in the career journeys of the mid-career teachers because they were found to influence the decisions they made and their feelings of job satisfaction and job motivation. The critical events identified were: (i) entering the profession; (ii) moving schools and/or leaving in the short-term; (iii) making decisions within the profession; (iv) considering leaving the profession; (v) remaining in the profession; and (vi) leaving the profession permanently. Collectively these critical events told the career story of the mid-career teachers in this study.

Findings and Discussion

Critical Events

To determine the reasons why mid-career teachers stay and leave, it was important to learn about their experiences through their stories. During the data analysis process, six critical events were identified as being commonly important and influential stages in the teaching stories of the mid-career teachers interviewed. These critical events have allowed for a deeper insight into and understanding of the lived experiences of the participants during their teaching journeys. The critical events were found to influence where a mid-career teacher was placed on the hierarchy of needs pyramid, therefore supporting the notion that people can move up or down the pyramid during their career depending on a range of different factors.

Table 2 displays how the critical events link to the themes and Maslow's hierarchy of needs and how they are influenced by personal and external factors.

Critical Events		Themes	Hierarchy of Needs	Influences (personal and/or external)
1. Entering the profession	Intrinsic/altruistic reasons	Job motivation	Self-transcendence Self-actualisation Esteem Social	Personal
	Extrinsic reasons	Job motivation	Safety/security Physiological	External
	Other reasons	Job motivation	Safety/security Physiological	Personal & external
2. Moving schools/and or leaving in the short-term	Moving schools	Job satisfaction Job motivation Career progression	Self-actualisation Esteem Social Safety/security Physiological	Personal & external
	Leaving in the short-term	Teachers' work Job satisfaction Job motivation Career progression Retention	Self-transcendence Self-actualisation Esteem Social Safety/security Physiological	Personal
3. Making decisions within the profession	Moving from a classroom teacher to a position of added responsibility	Job satisfaction Job motivation Career progression	Self-transcendence Self-actualisation Esteem Safety/security	Personal & external
	Moving from a position of added responsibility to a classroom teacher	Job dissatisfaction Teachers' work	Safety/security Physiological	Personal & external
	Remaining as a classroom teacher	Teachers' work Job satisfaction Job motivation	Self-transcendence Self-actualisation	Personal & external
	Moving to a different position with education	Job satisfaction Job motivation Career progression Retention	Self-transcendence Self-actualisation	Personal & external
4. Considering leaving the profession	Internal factors	Teachers' work Career progression	Self-actualisation Esteem	Personal & external
	External factors	Teachers' work Job dissatisfaction Job motivation Career progression	Esteem Physiological	Personal & external
5. Remaining in the profession	Intrinsic benefits and rewards of being a teacher	Job satisfaction Job motivation	Self-transcendence	Personal
	Job security	Job motivation	Safety/security	Personal & external
	Uncertainty of moving professions	Job satisfaction Job motivation Retention	Safety/security	Personal & external
6. Leaving the profession permanently	Stress and exhaustion	Teachers' work Retention	Esteem Physiological	Personal & external
	Career progression	Job satisfaction Job motivation Career progression Retention	Self-actualisation Esteem	Personal & external
	Organisational culture	Teachers' work Job satisfaction Job motivation Career progression Retention	Self-transcendence Self-actualisation Esteem Social Safety/security Physiological	Personal & external

Table 2: Links across the critical events, themes and the hierarchy of needs

Entering the Profession

The first critical event, entering the profession, identified the range and variety of reasons influencing why participants chose to pursue a teaching career. It was important to explore whether these initial motivations remained the same throughout a teacher's career, or whether they changed, what influenced this change and how these motivations impact on which teachers stay in or leave the classroom and the teaching profession.

In order to relate to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, factors influencing this critical event were organised into the intrinsic, altruistic and extrinsic reasons influencing the

participants' decisions to enter the profession. When these reasons were juxtaposed against Maslow's hierarchy, the internal and altruistic reasons relate to the higher order needs of the pyramid, which are social, esteem, self-actualization and self-transcendence needs. The extrinsic reasons related to physiological and safety/security needs, which are at the lower levels of the hierarchy. Different people have different 'career trajectories' in mind when they join the profession (Ponnock, Torsney & Lombardi, 2018; Watt & Richardson, 2008; Watt et al., 2012), and the range of reasons for choosing teaching suggests that not all teachers begin at the lowest need when they enter the profession. However, even though a teacher may begin in the profession addressing a higher order need, the findings indicated that there is potential for downward movement, dependent on the meeting of lower order needs or the influence of external factors.

The sixth or highest level of Maslow's hierarchy is self-transcendence. At this level, individuals display characteristics of altruism, where they put aside their own needs and focus on service to others (Vanagas & Raksyns, 2014). Three of the participants' reasons for choosing teaching were related to altruistic factors. Teachers 1, 7 and 8 had always wanted to become teachers since they were at school. All three teachers spoke of one of their motivations for becoming a teacher along the same lines as Teacher 1, which was to "…help people. I wanted to be a better teacher than some of the teachers I had" (T1).

All three teachers demonstrated qualities that would position them at the self-transcendence level when entering the profession. Of these three teachers (1, 7 and 8), only one was still in the profession at the time of data collection. The higher order need demonstrated by these teachers when they entered the profession was unable to be maintained when there were a number of lower needs that were not being met. Teachers 1 and 8 left the profession for reasons such as an unsupportive school culture, no long-term goals in education, the intensification of the job and factors external to education. In relation to Maslow, these reasons for leaving relate to the physiological level (working conditions/environment) and the social and esteem levels not being met. As Seath (1993) claims, and as was shown by these teachers, a person is unlikely to be motivated to achieve or maintain higher level needs if those at the lower levels are not satisfied.

Altruistic qualities of helping and interacting with students were also identified by participants in this study as an important source of job satisfaction. Nearly all teachers indicated that they were motivated in the short and long term by intrinsic factors related to the nature of teaching. Seven of the eight participants who identified intrinsic reasons for initially choosing teaching are still in the profession. However, as explained through the hierarchy of needs and reinforced by Teacher 10, over time intrinsic reasons alone cannot always keep teachers motivated: "teaching [is] just very, very under-rated, undervalued" (T10).

Teachers 4, 10 and 15 were influenced to go into teaching because of the economic benefits associated with the profession (Balyer & Ozcan, 2014). These three teachers specifically referred to the competitive starting salary and the stability of teaching as a profession. As Teacher 10 stated, "it was a safe, secure, sensible job". These extrinsic factors correspond to the physiological and safety/security lower order needs.

Teachers 2, 4, 5, 6, 9 and 10 suggested that they did not initially see themselves becoming teachers. Teachers 4, 11, 13, 14 and 19 had undertaken a previous degree with the intention of completing a teaching qualification later. It must be noted that teaching is the first and only profession that these five teachers have worked in. Furthermore, all of these teachers are still in the profession and three of the five are still classroom teachers.

Teachers 9, 16 and 18 stated that they studied teaching but were not necessarily motivated to go into it. All three teachers are still in the profession. Of the twelve teachers who did not initially see themselves as or want to be teachers, and/or completed a teaching

degree later, ten remain in the profession. Seven of these teachers have been motivated to experience positions of added responsibility during their career and seven have made the decision to remain or move back to a classroom teacher role. Most of these teachers indicated that they are now motivated, in the short and long-term, by intrinsic factors related to the job.

Moving Schools and/or Leaving in the Short-Term

This section discusses the next critical event, which is moving schools and or leaving in the short-term. Examples of movement between schools include participants moving to different schools within Queensland, teaching across different states and teaching overseas. The two main reasons that prompted participants to leave teaching in the short-term were for parental leave and to pursue other employment opportunities.

Nineteen of the 20 mid-career teachers interviewed changed schools during their teaching journey. It was found that approximately three quarters of the participants had taught in at least three different schools in Australia or overseas. Across the participants, this movement occurred in the 'beginning teacher' phase of their teaching journeys. All mid-career teachers interviewed had been at their most recent schools for at least five years. Reasons for moving schools included geographic location, family, permanency of employment, teaching opportunities within subject areas, promotion opportunities and wanting to experience a different school culture. Most of these reasons are characteristic of a teacher moving from the beginning to mid-career phase, where teachers typically start to settle, start a family and look for opportunities for promotion (Sikes, 1985).

Fessler (1995) found that teachers may re-enter the induction phase of their career with a change in their working lives, such as starting at a new workplace. As a result, a teacher's placement on the hierarchy of needs may go up or down. For example, if teachers move schools for a promotional opportunity, they may move straight to the esteem level, whereas if they move from a regional school to a metropolitan school, it may have been prompted by external factors. In this instance, the move and therefore the job context and security are what motivates the teacher.

For many of the female mid-career participants, short-term leave from the profession was due to parental leave. Teachers 3, 6, 7, 12, 13, 15, 19 and 20 all had time away from the profession for parental leave, and for some of these participants, this occurred more than once. All participants returned to teaching after the duration of their leave for reasons similar to Teacher 15, who said, "I only left the one year on maternity leave and then came back part-time… I really did miss it". These participants found that time away from the classroom provided them time to re-gather, re-assess their goals, motivations and priorities and have a "chance to recharge my batteries" (T15). When these teachers returned, satisfying their safety need was important in terms of having a regular income to support a growing family and manage time outside of work to spend with their children.

The second major factor influencing teachers 6, 9, 18 and 20 to leave the teaching profession was the desire to pursue a different career. Fessler (1995) and Williams and Fox (1995) explained how the desire to do something different or to pursue a new challenge is common to mid-career teachers and as Holmes and Cartwright (1994) have suggested, this can be a reason that prompts mid-career employees to consider a career change. A desire to do something different relates to the higher order needs of the esteem and self-actualisation levels.

Regardless of their reasons for leaving the profession, the reasons stated by participants for returning to teaching included that they missed teaching (self-actualisation/self-transcendence), they felt re-motivated towards teaching after having time

away (esteem) and that it is a reliable and stable profession (safety/security).

Making Decisions within the Profession

During the teaching journeys of the mid-career teachers interviewed, there were a number of decisions made by teachers. Movement due to promotion was found to be common for these mid-career teachers. Some participants had moved to positions of added responsibility (for example, as Head of Department or Year Level Coordinator) with some returning to the position of classroom teacher. Some participants chose to remain as classroom teachers, despite having various opportunities to move to a middle management position. Two of the participants were about to move out of teaching to another position within the broader education field.

Seventeen of the participants had moved to a position of added responsibility during their careers, reflecting the findings of Sikes (1985). The need for self-actualisation/self-fulfilment was expressed by Teachers 4, 12 and 16 as a reason for moving up into a position of added responsibility. These teachers stated that they wanted to experience change and had a desire to do something different from a classroom teacher role; “I guess I wanted something, a bit more of a new challenge” (T12). The participants who moved into positions of added responsibility related to pastoral care, all stated that they enjoyed the position as it provided the opportunity to get to know the students on a different level from that of a classroom teacher role. These altruistic reasons correspond to the self-transcendence level of the hierarchy. “I deal with them on a different level and that’s what I enjoy about it” (T17). This study suggests that the motivation for teachers to pursue pastoral focused positions of added responsibility was to satisfy higher order needs.

Four of the 17 participants who had moved to a position of added responsibility have now moved back to the position of classroom teacher. Across these participants there were four common reasons why this decision was made. The first reason related to family commitments and priorities. Both Teachers 6 and 13 made reference to their priorities changing after having children. This is different from when they were early career teachers, as most did not have family commitments then and their jobs were the focus of their lives (Lusty, 2013). For most teachers in the mid-career stage, teaching is no longer the primary element in their lives; instead priorities have changed (Lusty, 2013). The importance of a work/life balance becomes even more important at the mid-career stage.

Six of the 20 participants had predominantly remained in the classroom for their teaching careers. Three of the participants had held brief roles as acting heads of department, or year level coordinators/heads of house before returning to the classroom. Participants reported two key reasons for choosing to remain in the classroom despite having opportunities to move into positions of added responsibility permanently. The first reason was family priorities. Teachers 5 and 15 felt that spending time with their young families was more important to them than spending more time at work (Sikes, 1985). Factors such as family commitments highlight how a teacher’s placement on the hierarchy of needs can be strongly influenced by external factors. The second reason given by Teachers 2, 5 and 14 who have chosen to remain in the classroom was that they did not want the extra stress associated with a position of added responsibility.

The mid-career teachers who chose to remain in the classroom explained that they did not want to move into a position of added responsibility as the nature of the job changes and the idea of teaching and working with students is what initially attracted them to the profession (Bayler & Ozcan, 2014). Working with students is also what provides them job satisfaction and motivation; keeping them at the self-actualisation/self-fulfilment and self-

transcendence levels. All six teachers who predominantly remained as classroom teachers are still in the profession.

Considering Leaving the Profession

This critical event has been organised into internal and external events influencing participants to consider leaving the profession. Internal factors were those from within the individual, for example feelings, emotions and beliefs, whereas external factors were those outside of the individual that cannot be directly controlled, such as the school culture. It should be recognised that all participants interviewed expressed that they had considered leaving the profession at some point in their teaching journey. This study found that the period of contemplating whether or not to leave the profession does not just happen at a set time or for a set length of time. It can start during the beginning teacher phase and become more predominant during the mid-career stage. For some participants the thought process of leaving had occurred more often and for a longer period of time than for other participants. Common responses to the interview question, "Have you ever left, or considered leaving teaching?", included, "Yes", "Definitely" and "All the time".

It is important to recognise that many of the internal factors experienced by participants are linked to the external factors identified in the section below. For example, the internal factors or feelings are often a consequence of the external factors. This also highlights that a teacher's movement up and down the pyramid of needs is connected to a number of factors. The main internal factors influencing the teachers in this study to consider leaving teaching were feelings of stress and exhaustion and the limited long-term options for growth.

There were three key external factors identified by participants that influenced them to consider leaving the profession. The first factor relates to the school (in particular, the culture of the school), the second factor was the teaching workload and the third factor related to family and personal life.

Teachers 17 and 19 explained how the culture within one of the schools they worked at influenced them to consider leaving teaching and motivated them to apply for jobs elsewhere: "…made me hate teaching, it really, really, did… The culture of the school, I was made to feel like, useless" (T17). It was found that participants associated the senior administration/the school leadership team (for example, Principal, Deputy Principal/Deans) with the culture of the school and, as a result, this was also identified as a factor affecting their considerations about leaving the profession. Participants in their interviews made reference to how they felt that there was a lack of support from the school leadership team, as well as a lack of acknowledgement and recognition for the work being completed. As Teacher 5 explained, "Every year it feels like you get asked for more and more; more and more of ourselves; more and more of our time; and expectations just get higher and higher without any support". Lack of support by the school leadership team has also been identified in this study as a major factor contributing to job dissatisfaction for teachers. This finding is also consistent with a study conducted by Boyd et al. (2011), who explored the relationship between school contextual factors and teacher retention decisions in New York City.

In this study it was found that one of the main factors providing motivation for teachers was the need to feel valued through recognition and acknowledgement (Fisher & Royster, 2016). Twelve of the teachers all specifically commented on the importance of acknowledgement in the workplace. As Teacher 11 declared, "if you feel valued, and you feel connected with the people you're with, you are more inclined to stay". Teacher 19 shared a simple example of recognition:

> *It's a bit of a joke but it's funny because things that are regularly talked about at our school are things like providing nice meals (I'm not kidding) at parent/teacher nights. And people say if they showed that they really, really appreciated us, because it is all well and good saying that, we value you, well like it's on those nights that we feel we are slogging out our guts, don't give us orphanage slop, give us something better! So I think there is a little bit of a holistic package that needs to go on. (T19)*

The idea of feeling recognised, valued and acknowledged is identified within Maslow's hierarchy as the third highest need: esteem.

The nature of teaching and its work intensification was the second external factor identified by teachers. Teacher 10 talked specifically about the workload, reflecting, "I think I spend so much time worrying about all the work I had to do" (T10). Similarly, Teacher 13 referred to the lack of time to complete the expected workload and found, "I've just got to the point where there is just not enough time to do it".

Within Maslow's hierarchy of needs, teachers' work relates to the physiological needs, or the working conditions of the job. These needs are located at the first level of the hierarchy. The ability of teachers to progress and satisfy higher order needs within Maslow's hierarchy may be very difficult if they experience dissatisfaction with the working conditions (Seath, 1993).

Family commitments and personal life were other external factors identified by participants that made them consider leaving teaching. Teacher 7 and 13 commented on how their family and associated commitments triggered them to re-evaluate teaching and the number of hours that they were spending on the job.

Remaining in the Profession

This critical event explores why 15 of the 20 participants interviewed have chosen to remain in the profession. The main reasons identified in the interviews included the intrinsic factors involved in teaching, the stability/job security and a 'family flexible' lifestyle and participants expressing uncertainty as to career options other than teaching.

Across the participants' stories of their teaching journeys and their reasons for choosing to remain in the profession, a recurring reason was related to the intrinsic benefits and rewards of being a teacher. The intrinsic factors such as building relationships with students and helping them learn is both a form of job satisfaction and a reason why teachers choose to remain in the profession (Cockburn & Haydn, 2004). The self-transcendence level that can be achieved through working with and helping students is what helps retain these teachers in the profession.

The financial security of having a stable job was both a factor that influenced participants to choose teaching as a career and to remain in the profession. Long-term job stability and security relates to the safety/security level of Maslow's hierarchy. Teachers 15 and 16 spoke specifically about the need to have a steady income to meet financial commitments such as a mortgage and supporting a family.

Teachers 2, 3, 4 and 20 all mentioned that they were uncertain which other professions they could enter if they left teaching. While one teacher mentioned, "I couldn't think what else I would be right to do" (T2), another commented, "I have often considered leaving but I really don't know who else would have me" (T20). Participants expressed that they were unsure how their skill-set would transfer to other jobs/professions and because of limited experience in areas other than teaching they would have to start at the bottom and work their way up.

Leaving the Profession Permanently

Five of the mid-career teachers interviewed in this study had left the teaching profession permanently at the time of the research. Across these five participants there were three recurring reasons that prompted the mid-career teachers to leave the profession: stress and exhaustion, factors related to career progression and the organisational culture.

The stress and exhaustion related to the intensification of the teaching workload was a factor that was repeatedly identified within the findings of this study. It is one reason why teachers move down from a position of added responsibility and/or choose to remain as a classroom teacher and is a reason that not only influences mid-career teachers to *consider* leaving the profession, but is also a reason why they *do* eventually leave (Fisher & Royster, 2016).

Three of the five teachers who have left the profession all explained that stress was a factor that influenced them to leave. Teacher 1 talked about feeling "stressed out of my brain" and "[I] wasn't sleeping cos I was working so hard". Teacher 10 believed that the stress and busyness were linked to the ever-increasing workload and the expectation that teachers can do more with limited time and resources.

The lack of career progression options was also a factor that was found to influence mid-career teachers to consider leaving the profession (Buchanan, 2009). Three of the five teachers who left the profession did so for reasons related to career progression. Teacher 6 suggested that they left teaching because they had a desire to do something different. These reasons relate to the esteem and self-fulfilment/self-actualisation levels of Maslow's pyramid and it is the gratification of these higher-order needs that increases job satisfaction (Bishay, 1996).

The findings of this study have demonstrated how the organisational culture of the school and teachers, which is influenced by the senior leadership team can both influence a mid-career teacher to *consider* leaving and is also a reason why they *do* finally leave.

The teachers who had left the profession permanently commented on how the expectation to do more in less time and with fewer resources created constant stress and exhaustion. Both Teachers 6 and 8 made comparisons between how their job satisfaction and job motivation changed in different schools or with different school leadership teams. Teacher 6 explained that when she moved from a school with supportive staff to a school where the staff culture was less supportive and lacking in collegiality, her level of job satisfaction decreased (Campbell, 2005). Indeed, most teachers derive their strongest rewards from the external recognition they receive from colleagues, parents and Principals (Rosenholtz, 1989).

The culture of the school can potentially influence a teacher's career movement, regardless of where they may be placed on Maslow's hierarchy of needs. For example, it is not only a factor that affects lower order needs such as job context at the physiological level, it also plays a key role in the satisfaction of higher order needs, such as esteem and self-fulfilment/self-actualisation needs. It was found in this study that recognition for work done, opportunities for promotion and to professionally grow and develop, are all factors that the teachers believed could be influenced by the culture of the school. In turn, all of these factors contribute to job satisfaction and job motivation for mid-career teachers.

Conclusion: The Profile of a Mid-Career Teacher

This study involved interviews with 20 mid-career teachers from Queensland, Australia. These interviews provided opportunities to learn about teaching journeys by listening to their individual stories and experiences in order to gain a better understanding of the motivations and needs of teachers in this career stage. In particular, the focus of this research was on answering the research question, "Why do mid-career teachers stay in, or leave, the classroom and the profession?"

Critical events were found to influence where a mid-career teacher was placed on the hierarchy of needs pyramid, therefore supporting the notion that people can move up or down the pyramid during their career depending on a range of different factors. For example, while pay and security are very important to mid-career teachers to support family and extra financial commitments, these teachers have a need for acknowledgement/recognition and support by senior administration and colleagues for the work that they do (Boyd et al., 2011). Mid-career teachers also require opportunities for development and progression (Ponnock, Torsney & Lombardi, 2018). Based on the discussion of the six critical events and the use of Maslow's hierarchy as a theoretical framework, a profile of a mid-career teacher has emerged.

This profile will be a useful source of information for schools and researchers alike when understanding how to provide and/or develop job satisfaction and motivation and retain the knowledge, experience and skills of experienced teachers. Whilst the reasons around beginning teacher attrition have been widely researched, there is a lack of literature surrounding teacher retention in the mid-career stage. Mid-career teachers leaving the profession or moving to different schools are a costly event, not only for the students, who lose the benefit of being taught by an experienced teacher, but also to the schools, which must recruit, train and develop new teachers (Brill & McCartney, 2008).

For the purpose of this study, a mid-career teacher was defined as a teacher who has between seven and 20 years of teaching experience. It was found in this study that mid-career teachers typically ranged in age from their late twenties to their mid-forties. Not all participants have necessarily gone straight from school into a teaching degree, nor have they gone straight into teaching upon the completion of their education degree.

Typically, a mid-career teacher will have moved schools at least twice. Some, but not all, have had experience teaching interstate or overseas, or both. No teachers interviewed had considered moving or had moved overseas to teach in their mid-career stage. All mid-career teachers in the study had taught outside of Brisbane, the capital city of the State.

Fifteen of the participants' teaching journeys and their career motivations were influenced by their family commitments (Sikes, 1985). This included their motivation to remain in teaching for job safety/security, as well as the financial need to progress further than a classroom teacher role. Seventeen of the mid-career teachers had experienced a position of added responsibility in some form. All mid-career teachers in the study had considered leaving the profession during their teaching careers.

The main factors that provide job satisfaction for mid-career teachers include interacting with and helping students and professional development/ongoing learning. These factors all relate to the higher order needs on Maslow's hierarchy (see Table 2). Sources of job dissatisfaction are linked to teachers' work and the work intensification and lack of support and understanding by the school administration/leadership team. These sources of job dissatisfaction equate to the lower order needs on Maslow's hierarchy and when these dissatisfiers occur they impact on the ability of a mid-career teacher to achieve or maintain higher order needs.

Job motivation for mid-career teachers includes the intrinsic factors associated with

the job, for example, working with children and making a difference and interest in their teaching areas (the self-actualisation and self-transcendence levels). Other forms of job motivation include recognition and acknowledgement (from both the school leadership team and the community), opportunities for progression/development (Ponnock, Torsney & Lombardi, 2018), job security and financial remuneration.

Mid-career teachers leave the profession for the following reasons: stress and exhaustion (Fisher & Royster, 2016), limited career pathways for progression and dissatisfaction arising from the lack of support from the school leadership team (Boyd et al., 2011).

The reasons why mid-career teachers stay are predominantly related to the intrinsic aspects of the job, for example, the relationships built with students. Extrinsic aspects such as job security and financial reasons were also other reasons why mid-career teachers chose to stay in the profession.

The mid-career phase of teaching is often described as a time when people experience 'career frustration', 'disillusionment' and ultimately a 'mid-life crisis' (Lusty, 2013; Rolls & Plauborg, 2009). It is during this career stage that teachers contemplate their future career options and make a choice to stay in or leave the profession. All participants in this study had considered leaving the profession during their teaching careers. The consequences of teachers who have between seven and 20 years of teaching experience leaving the classroom and the profession have high monetary and non-monetary costs. It is, therefore imperative for schools and the profession to understand *who* these teachers are, and the main influences impacting on their career decisions, and *what* provides job motivation and job satisfaction for them, in order to identify *how* to retain and progress these teachers.

References

Balyer, A., & Özcan, K. (2014). Choosing teaching profession as a career: Students' reasons. *International Education Studies, 7*(5), 104. https://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v7n5p104

Bishay, A. (1996). Teacher motivation and job satisfaction: A study employing the experience sampling method. *Journal of Undergraduate Science*, *3*, 147-154.

Boyd, D., Grossman, P., Ing, M., Lankford, H., Loeb, S., & Wyckoff, J. (2011). The influence of school administrators on teacher retention decisions. *American Educational Research Journal*, *48(*2), 303-333. https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831210380788

Brill, S., & McCartney, A. (2008). Stopping the revolving door: Increasing teacher retention. *Politics & Policy*, *36*(5), 750-774. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-1346.2008.00133.x

Buchanan, J. (2009). Where are they now? Ex-teachers tell their life-work stories. *Issues in Educational Research*, *19*(1), 1-13.

Campbell, A. (2005). Enhancing teacher satisfaction: The vital role of school leaders. *Teacher*, *3*, 41-43.

Clandinin, D. J., & Caine, V. (2013). Narrative inquiry. In A. A. Trainor & E. Graue. (Eds.), *Reviewing qualitative research in the social sciences* (pp.166-179). New York, NY & London, UK: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Cockburn, A., & Haydn, T. (2004). *Recruiting and retaining teachers: Understanding why teachers teach.* London, England: Routledge Falmer. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203464854

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2000). *Research methods in education* (5th ed.). London, England: Routledge Falmer. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X019005002

Day, C., Stobart, G., Sammons, P., Kington, A., Gu, Q., Smees, R., & Mujtaba, T. (2006). *Variations in teachers' work, lives and effectiveness*. London, England: Department for Education and Skills. https://doi.org/10.1037/e615332007-001

Elbaz-Luwisch, F. (2007). Chapter 14 Studying teachers' lives and experience: Narrative inquiry into K–12 teaching. In D. Jean Clandinin (Eds.*), Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology* (pp. 357-383). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452226552.n14

Ellis, T. (1984). Motivating teachers for excellence. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, ERIC Digest, 6.

Fessler, R., & Christensen, J. (1992). *The teacher career cycle: Understanding and guiding the professional development of teachers*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Fessler, R. (1995). Dynamics of teacher career stages. In T. Guskey & M. Huberman (Eds.), *Professional development in education: New paradigms and practices* (pp. 171–192). New York: Teachers College Press.

Fisher, M., & Royster, D. (2016). Mathematics teachers' support and retention: Using maslow's hierarchy to understand teachers' needs. *International Journal of Mathematical Education in Science and Technology*, *47*(7), 993-1008. https://doi.org/10.1080/0020739X.2016.1162333

Hargreaves, A., & Fullan, M. (2012). *Professional capital: Transforming teaching in every school*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Holmes, T., & Cartwright, S. (1994). Mid-career change: The ingredients for success. *Employee Relations*. *16*(7), 58-72. https://doi.org/10.1108/01425459410073997

Huberman, M. (1993). *The Lives of Teachers*. London, England: Cassell.

Ingersoll, R. (2001). Teacher turnover and teacher shortages: An organizational analysis. *American Educational Research Journal*, *38*(3), 499-534. https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312038003499

Ingersoll, R. (2002). The teacher shortage: A case of wrong diagnosis and wrong prescription. *NASSP Bulletin*, *86*(631), 16-31. https://doi.org/10.1177/019263650208663103

Ingvarson, L., & Chadbourne, R. (1997). Reforming teachers' pay systems: The advanced skills teacher in Australia. *Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education*, *11*(1), 7-30. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1007943119564

Koltko-Rivera, M. (2006). Rediscovering the later version of Maslow's hierarchy of needs: Self-transcendence and opportunities for theory, research. *Review of General Psychology*, *10*(4), 302-317. https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.10.4.302

Lusty, R. (2013). Career crossroads: A Delphi study of the motivations and concerns of mid-career teachers in NSW Department of Education and Communities primary schools. *Leading and Managing*. *19*(2), 88-105.

Lynn, S. (2002). The winding Path: Understanding the career cycle of teachers. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, *75*(4), 179-182. https://doi.org/10.1080/00098650209604926

Maslow, A. (1954). *Motivation and Personality*. New York: Harper.

Mason, J. (2002). *Qualitative Researching*. London, England: Sage Publications Ltd.

McCreight, C. (2000). Teacher attrition, shortages and strategies for teacher retention. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *16*(3).

McKenzie, P., Santiago, P., Sliwka, P., & Hiroyuki, H. (2005). *Teachers matter: Attracting, developing and retaining effective teachers*. Paris, France: OECD, 2005.

MetLife. (2013). *The MetLife survey of the American teacher 2012: Challenges for school leadership*. New York: Louis Harris & Associates, Inc.

Minichiello, V., Aroni, R., Timewell, E., & Alexander, I. (1995). *In-depth interviewing: Principles, techniques, analysis*. Melbourne, Australia: Longman.

Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Ltd.

Pinnegar, S., & Daynes, J.G. (2007). Locating narrative inquiry historically. In D. J. Clandinin. (Eds.), *Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology* (pp.3-34). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. https://doi.org/10.1080/00098650209604926

Ponnock, A., Torsney, B., & Lombardi, D. (2018). Motivational differences throughout teachers' preparation and career. *New Waves*, *21*(2), 26-45.

Rolls, S., & Plauborg, H. (2009). Teachers' career trajectories: An examination of research. In M. Bayer, U. Brinkkjaer, H. Plauborg & S. Rolls (Eds.), *Teachers' career trajectories and work lives* (pp. 9-28). Netherlands: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-90-481-2358-2_2

Rosenholtz, S. (1989). Workplace conditions that affect teacher quality and commitment: Implications for teacher induction programs. *The Elementary School Journal*, *89*(4), 421-439. https://doi.org/10.1086/461584

Schulte, M. (2018). Adult learning degree and career pathways: Allusions to maslow's hierarchy of needs. *Journal of Continuing Higher Education*, *66*(1), 62-64. https://doi.org/10.1080/07377363.2017.1368767

Schwandt, T. (1994). Constructivist, interpretivist approaches to human inquiry. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 118-137). London: Sage.

Seath, I. (1993). Turning theory into practice. *Managing Service Quality: An International Journal*, *6*, 35-37.

Sikes, P. (1985). The life cycle of the teacher. In S. Ball & I. Goodson (Eds.), *Teachers' lives and careers* (pp. 27–60). Lewes: Falmer.

Steffy, B., & Wolfe, M. (2001). A life-cycle model for career teachers. *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, *38*(1), 16-19. https://doi.org/10.1080/00228958.2001.10518508

Vanagas, R., & Raksyns, A. (2014). The dichotomy of self-actualization and self-transcendence. *Verslo Sistemos ir Ekonomika*. *4*(2), 196-203. https://doi.org/10.13165/VSE-14-4-2-07

Watt, H., & Richardson, P. (2008). Motivations, perceptions, and aspirations concerning teaching as a career for different types of beginning teachers. *Learning and Instruction*. *18*(5), 408-428. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2008.06.002

Watt, H., Richardson, P., Klusmann, U., Kunter, M., Beyer, B., Trautwein, U., & Baumert, J. (2012). Motivations for choosing teaching as a career: An international comparison using the FIT-Choice scale. *Teacher and Teacher Education*. *28*(6), 791-805. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2012.03.003

Webster, L., & Mertova, P. (2007). *Using Narrative Inquiry as a research method: An introduction to using critical event narrative analysis in research on learning and teaching*. New York: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203946268

Williams, S., & Fox, C. (1995). Organizational approaches for managing mid-career personnel. *Public Personnel Management*, *24*(3), 351-363. https://doi.org/10.1177/009102609502400307