

# Investigating the factors that influence the choice of teaching as a first career

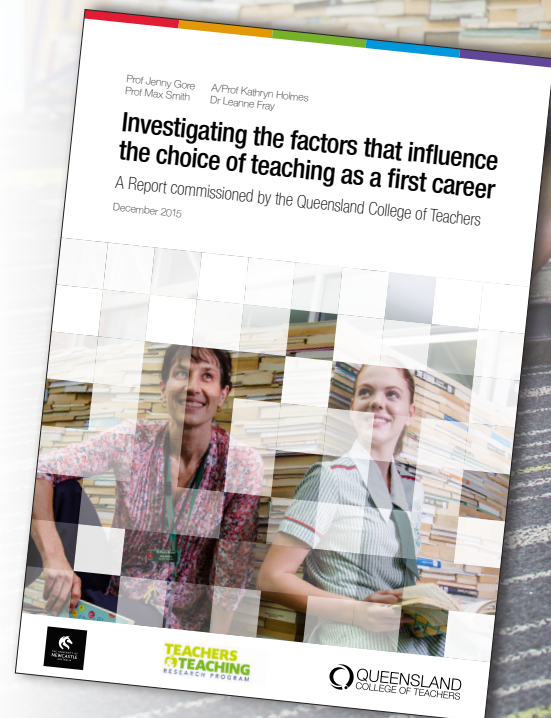
Report summary

## Background

Attracting quality candidates to pursue teaching as a career is one means of enhancing the overall quality of teaching. The Queensland College of Teachers (QCT) as the teacher registration authority in Queensland, is in a unique position to identify and promote strategies that will attract quality teaching candidates to the profession.

In August 2015, the QCT engaged the University of Newcastle to review recent literature on factors that influence the choice of teaching as a first career.

The results from this literature review will help inform the development of policy, relevant stakeholder consultations and activities that the QCT could pursue to address any identified concerning issues.









## Scope of literature review

Between 2005 and 2015, very little research has been done to examine factors that influence the choice of teaching as a first career.

What the research does suggest, however, is that influences on the choice of teaching as a career do not appear to differ significantly between those who choose teaching as a first career, and those who enter teaching later.

The review was expanded to examine what contemporary literature says about:

- the factors that influence someone to choose teaching as a career; and
- how influences differ according to different demographic groups, if at all.



# Factors influencing the choice of teaching as a career

Influences include significant others, intrinsic, altruistic and extrinsic motivations, socio-cultural factors, self-perceived teaching ability, demographic characteristics and, for a few, teaching as a fallback career.

## Influence of others

Significant others who influence the choice of teaching as a career include:

- family
- friends
- inspirational role models (including teachers)
- positive school experiences
- mass media.

## Teaching as a fallback career

Australian research conducted with 1,653 preservice teachers found that teaching is not typically considered a 'fallback' career chosen only because other options were not available or did not work out.

Recent research suggests that seeing teaching as a fallback career is not necessarily negative.

Choosing teaching as a fallback career could be positive when it was seen as a viable alternative linked with intrinsic and altruistic motivation.

## Socio-cultural influences

Research within the last decade on socio-cultural factors influencing the choice to enter teaching has been patchy.

Some socio-cultural influences are:

- the status of teachers
- religion
- social expectations
- cultural understandings
- gender roles
- emotional capital
- economic conditions.



## Other factors

Other factors that may influence the choice of teaching as a career, positively or negatively, include:

- failure to gain entry into preferred course
- family pressure
- uncertainty about career options
- social dissuasion
- fallback career
- teaching an unattractive career option
- low salary
- poor job prospects
- earning opportunities outside teaching
- teaching as a 'calling'.

# Motivations for choosing teaching as a career

The past decade has seen an increased interest in exploring how an individual's motivation influences the decision to choose teaching as a career. Three key motives are altruistic, intrinsic and extrinsic.

# Altruistic motivation

Altruistic motivation is one of the key influences on the choice of teaching as a career and includes:

- a desire to help children/adolescents/others
- a desire to improve or contribute to society
- providing a meaningful and worthwhile service to others including individuals, community and country
- answering a calling
- a desire to teach
- wanting to help children and young people
- wanting to make a worthwhile contribution to the lives of children/young people
- wanting to make a difference.

Altruistic motivation rarely exists in isolation and is often tied to intrinsic motives.





# Intrinsic motivation

A passion or vocation for teaching children or adolescents, an interest in the subject matter and other factors inherent to teaching are often cited as intrinsic reasons for choosing teaching as a profession.

Intrinsic motivations can take a number of forms such as:

- a quest for self-realisation
- development of skills and knowledge useful to a teaching career
- participation in something that is interesting or intellectually stimulating
- personal development
- a quest for fulfilment or purpose
- enjoying the company of children
- enjoyment or interest in teaching
- desire to work with children
- love/like children and adolescents
- being suited to teaching
- personal satisfaction
- interest in teaching
- love of the profession
- meaningful engagement with subject
- a sense of achievement.

# Extrinsic motivation

Extrinsic motivation is most commonly related to characteristics of the job itself such as holidays, salary, status and other beneficial working conditions.

Studies in western countries have found that extrinsic motives such as secure job conditions, working hours and reliable incomes were not as important as intrinsic and altruistic motivations for teaching.

Other extrinsic motivations that influence the choice of teaching as a career include:

- job benefits
- perceived life fit
- multiple job options
- balancing work and family
- status
- working conditions including holidays and work hours.



# Adaptive and maladaptive motives

Some research has shown that motivation can be seen as either adaptive or maladaptive.

Maladaptive (negative) motives include:

- teaching as a fallback career
- negative social influences.

Adaptive (positive) motives include:

- teaching ability
- shaping the future of children
- enhancing social equity
- social status
- intrinsic career values
- expertise
- making a social contribution.



## Motivations based on the 'FIT-Choice model'

The FIT-Choice (Factors Influencing Teaching Choice) model was developed to overcome some of the issues with motivational research on the choice of teaching as a career.

The model has been used in Australia and internationally over the past decade.

The most frequently rated motivations found using this model were:

- preservice teachers' perceived teaching ability
- positive prior teaching and learning experiences
- personal utility values (job security, job transferability and time for family)
- the intrinsic value of teaching and social utility values (shaping the future of children, enhancing social equity, making a social contribution and working with children and adolescents).

# Demographic characteristics

While there is much research that focuses on motivation for teaching and the influences on teaching, there is little evidence to report on the demographic characteristics of preservice teachers or others aspiring to a career in teaching.

Research from the last decade provides some evidence of characteristics such as country of residence, socio-economic status, gender, age, and differences between various teacher types.



## Country of residence

A cross national study using the FIT-Choice model found that motivations for teaching varied according to country of residence; for example job security factors were more important for Australian preservice teachers than for those from the US, Germany and Norway.

Overall, however, there were more similarities than differences in motivations across the four countries studied.





## Gender

In 2012, education was reported as one of the most gender-segregated professions in OECD countries. However, this area remains under-researched.

In Australia, research with 324 pre-service physical education teachers indicated that females are more likely to be intrinsically motivated than males.

Research from the United Kingdom found that gender was not regarded as having any particular significance to the careers of primary school teachers.

Some research from Sweden found that stronger altruistic motives were reported by female than male preservice teachers.

Research from Turkey suggests females choose teaching from altruistic, intrinsic and influenced-based extrinsic motivations, whereas males choose a career based on extrinsic and mercenary motives.

## Age

Few studies have examined age as a variable with reference to influences on the choice of teaching as a profession.

One Australian study found age was not an influence on the motivations of preservice teachers to teach.

## Teacher types

Several studies have examined differences between different types of teachers, such as primary and secondary or teachers of different subjects.

A large survey in Australia found that primary and secondary teachers share the same basic, primarily intrinsic, reasons for becoming a teacher.

Research from the United Kingdom has identified 3 teacher types:

- career teachers (committed to a long term teaching career)
- classroom teachers (content to remain in the classroom with students)
- portfolio teachers (teaching as a temporary measure)

Career teachers saw teaching as a valuable and altruistic career, but all three teacher types were motivated by the desire to work with children.

Other research found the love of, or interest, in a particular subject area was a key motivation for secondary preservice English teachers and technology and applied studies teachers were influenced by encouragement from community members and a desire to teach, and experience in technology during their own schooling.



# Summary

When considering the choice to become a teacher, multiple influences and motivations appear to be important and this may have implications for attracting teachers to the profession.

Factors influencing the choice of teaching as a career include:

- the influence of others, including friends, family, teachers and other role models. This influence could be positive or act as a form of social dissuasion.
- individual motivation, including intrinsic, altruistic and extrinsic. Intrinsic and altruistic motivation were shown to be far more important; however, extrinsic motivation played a significant role.
- socio-cultural influences including social roles and cultural understandings.
- teaching as a fallback career.
- prevailing economic conditions and labour market opportunities.

Much of the research since 2005 has been fragmented, with demographic characteristics of participants largely overlooked. Given the significant numbers of females who choose teaching as a career, a greater focus on influences on the choice of teaching for both males and females is needed.

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