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Understanding Teacher Attraction and Retention Drivers: Addressing Teacher Shortages

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Abstract: The attraction and retention of teachers is a problem faced by schools worldwide and possibly more so in the public sector. One possible solution to this problem is likely to be better targeting of attraction and retention drivers of value to teachers. This paper presents the findings from a qualitative study conducted in Australia. The study used electronic in-depth interviews and an online survey to interrogate the reasons teachers are attracted to the profession and what drives their decision to either stay or leave. Participants in the study were both serving and retired teachers. The majority of respondents cited intrinsic motivators as the reasons for joining the teaching profession and among the serving teachers, those with higher intrinsic motivational drivers exhibited a more positive intention to remain. While both groups viewed extrinsic rewards in the form of pay, the school environment and working conditions as important, intrinsic motivation had most influence on intention to stay in the profession.

Countries worldwide provide education for their people through school systems and growing teacher shortages are a challenge for schools globally. Education benefits societies through building human capital, aiding economic growth and enabling political participation (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, Commonwealth of Australia [SCRGSP], 2006), thus teacher shortages pose a threat to learning outcomes over the longer term. All schools depend on an available skilled and professional teaching workforce to achieve educational outcomes and critical for their success is the ability to attract, recruit and retain high quality teachers (Department of Education & Training Western Australia [DETWA], 2004). Currently the Western Australian government employs close to 20,000 teachers in the public sector and these are supported by teachers in the private and religious sector schools. Shortages are most apparent in specific areas, such as English as a second language, mathematics and the sciences, and with placement of teachers in remote areas; however, a Productivity Commission Report identified problems are expected to increase and widen over time (Department of Education [DOE], 2011). According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], (2011)

“... many advanced economies already face [teacher shortages] and that will grow in the near future as large numbers of teachers reach retirement age. Even where general teacher supply and demand are in balance, many countries face shortages of specialist teachers and shortages in schools serving disadvantaged or isolated communities” (OECD, 2011, p.10).

One estimate is that by 2016 primary schools around the world will face a shortage of 18 million teachers. This includes a 13 million shortfall in teachers in low-income regions and a further 5 million shortages in industrialised countries (Australian Associated Press [AAP], 2007).

Demand and supply in local labour markets influence career choices, and as skill shortages increase globally, teachers will seek better pay and conditions outside the profession. Dissatisfaction with teaching and increasing attrition through ageing of the teacher workforce will exacerbate the situation in the public sector. A precursor of what might be to come occurred in Western Australia in 2006-7 when a booming resources sector led many to seek alternative jobs in the private sector (Hiatt, 2007). In another example, a survey of over 1700 teachers across Australia in 2007, identified that behaviour management problems, heavy workloads, class sizes and poor pay were among teachers' top concerns (Australian Education Union [AEU], 2008; Hiatt, 2008) and that these concerns were contributing to attrition from the profession.

The reasons individuals are motivated to take up or leave any profession are many and complex so understanding the motivational reasons is necessary before any changes can be advocated (Analoui, 2007), which is why both attraction and retention are considered in this research. Some past literature suggests that non-monetary personal preferences, including the joy and desire associated with working with children, as well as intellectual fulfilment are some of the reasons people are attracted to teaching. Whereas, job satisfaction maintained through realistic work-loads, manageable class sizes and flexibility in compensation facilitate retention (Preston, 2000; Hunt, 2002; Skilbeck & Connell, 2003; Webster, Wooden & Marks, 2004). Nonetheless problems with teacher attraction and retention remain. Therefore, this research focusses on why some teachers are motivated to remain in the teaching profession for the duration of their working life. Are their experiences or expectations different? Understanding the motivational drivers of these long-term teachers may help provide further insights when addressing the problem.

This paper compares the findings from a series of in-depth interviews with retired teachers and a survey of currently serving teachers. Underpinning this approach was the assumption that retired teachers would have the time to participate and be willing to do so after having long careers in the sector. In addition, as they were no longer employed in the education system, they would be more likely to offer frank viewpoints. Open-ended questions sought to capture the retired teachers' perspectives on the issues they believe affected teacher attraction and retention. The retired teacher's opinions were then matched to the survey results from a small sample survey of active teachers to identify differences with regards to their motivation to enter or stay in the profession and their personal characteristics. This introductory section precedes a brief review of the extant literature on attraction and retention and previously identified reasons why teachers may choose to leave the profession, which in turn, leads to the research question for this study. Next is a description of the methods of analysis, the samples. The analysis and findings are then discussed along with the implications for practitioners and theoreticians. Finally, based on the findings, we propose some cost effective strategies to improve teacher attraction and retention.

Attraction and Retention Drivers

Attraction and retention are important for successful people management and successful organisations (Mello, 2006). This makes it important to understand the peculiar nature of teachers' motivations and how these differ from other professions. According to Ornstein and Levine (2006), becoming a teacher starts with the persuasion to choose teaching as a career; however, the motives for this can be idealistic or practical, varied and complex. This is partly because the teaching profession possesses some unique attributes. The profession suffers a status anomaly, where, for instance, teachers are praised for their dedication and commitment to education, but, on the other hand, they can be ridiculed by claims that teaching is easy work. In addition, although teaching is regarded as a profession, teachers receive less pay than many other professionals with a lesser education (Lortie, 2002). Nonetheless, individuals are attracted

to take up teaching places and remain in them, and a number of reasons are posited for why this occurs.

Why People are Attracted to Teaching

A fundamental reasoning that has a long history is that individuals are attracted to teaching because of their personal philosophy about education (Ornstein & Levine, 2006). During the classical periods in ancient Greece and Rome, education was encouraged to cultivate human excellence. In medieval times, and later during the religious reformation of the 16th and 17th centuries, religious membership facilitated the preservation and institutionalisation of knowledge (Ornstein & Levine, 2006). Even in today's schools, many individuals are drawn to teaching because of their philosophical beliefs. An example of this is the Steiner Waldorf education approach (Nicol, 2007), where the teacher has a sacred task to develop the child to fulfil his or her own unique destiny in life (Hale & Maclean, 2004; Steiner, 1988).

Previous studies have examined some of the intrinsic and extrinsic motivational preferences of teachers. One intrinsic reason that is often cited is the desire and joy of working with children. Another is the intellectual fulfilment that comes from imparting knowledge and making a valuable contribution to society (Kyriacou & Coulthard, 2000; Reid & Thornton, 2000; Committee for the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education, Commonwealth of Australia [CRTTE], 2003; Skilbeck & Connell 2003; Ornstein & Levine 2006). For example, a survey of teachers carried out in 2002 by Australia's Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA, 2003) found that approximately 31% of the respondents enjoyed working with children, 22.0% had a desire to teach, and 11.5% were attracted through a recruitment campaign or the positive impact of a role model. A further 8.6% were attracted to the employment conditions and 8.3% had a desire to make a difference or were attracted because of the value of education and care for humans (Skilbeck & Connell, 2003). This matches previous findings by Lester (1986) who argued that people are attracted to this profession because it not only enables them to offer services, but also gives them personal satisfaction as they see their students' accomplishments in later life.

Quite apart from the value of teaching, there are extrinsic reasons why some are motivated to enter the teaching profession. There is evidence that some young graduates choose this profession as it provides job security (Kyriacou & Coulthard, 2000; Webster et al. 2004). Other extrinsic reasons may be the perceived benefits such as length of holidays, promotion prospects and/or the opinions of others (Reid & Caudwell, 1997). Skilbeck and Connell (2003) point out that attraction to a teaching career also depends on conditional factors, such as their family background, their personal experience of other teachers, the availability of alternative work or other societal aspects. For example, men can be discouraged from accepting a profession in primary teaching because of negative perceptions of working with children (Hutchings, 2002; Lewis, 2002). Knowledge of the contribution the teacher makes to a students' success can also make teachers more enthusiastic (Ornstein & Levine, 2006) and this contributes to their job satisfaction.

The satisfaction one derives from working as a teacher is, overall, a major reason explaining why people become teachers (Hunt, 2002) and remain within the profession. The most common components of job satisfaction among teachers have been identified as: having realistic workloads, manageable class sizes, accessible curriculum materials and teaching resources; acknowledgement and reinforcement of good performance; career pathways; reasonable salaries; and opportunities for professional development (Skilbeck & Connell, 2003). When these are present, the implication is that teachers will have high job satisfaction and are more likely to remain in teaching (Norton, 2001).

Why Teachers Leave

There are a variety of reasons why people leave an organisation or profession. From a personal perspective, individuals may leave an organisation because of conflicting demands and lack of administrative support that will help them realise their goals (Ornstein & Levine, 2006). Other reasons are work – related; such as ‘hard’ working conditions, poor pay, better job alternatives, difficulty working with supervisors, lack of training, and pressure from non-work related issues, such as domestic problems or ill-health (Bunting, 2005). Others leave because the organisation’s goals do not match their own individual goals, interests and/or personality (Schneider, 1987). These reasons apply equally to schools. Factors affecting teacher turnover in the school sector include monetary rewards, personal and/or organisational issues, individual school characteristics, like size, geographical location and the sector type, and the organisational conditions teachers work under (Murnane, Singer, Willet & Olsen, 1991; Ingersoll, 2001a; Marshall & Marshall, 2003; Skilbeck & Connell, 2003), which are discussed below.

Teacher Personal Characteristics

Reasons in this category include personal issues such as age, gender, family situations, level of education, a teachers’ field of study, experiences, social contexts, and occupation preferences (Preston, 2000; Mitchell, Brooks, Holton & Lee, 2001; Ingersoll, 2001a). Using age as an example, younger age workers are more likely to leave than older ones (Kirby & Grissmer, 1993; Ingersoll, 2001a; Chelli & Rosti, 2002; Heijden, 2003). Likewise, the highest attrition rates evident among secondary teachers are those with qualifications in science (physics and chemistry), special education, mathematics, and those teachers with the lowest pay (Boe, Bobbitt & Cook, 1997). The ageing of the population generally will also have an effect; for example, a recent Department of Education submission to the Productivity Commission study of the schools workforce identified that 34% of teachers in Western Australia were over the age of 55 years and moving toward retirement (coupled with an increased number of students due to economic growth in the state, this will contribute to shortages over the longer term (submission 45, DOE, 2011).

The career aspirations of those going into the profession are also influenced by individual preferences; for example, a study with academically high-achieving girls indicated that highly feminised professions like teaching tend to attract this category of girls into this sector because it provides the possibility to combine work and family (Marks & Houston, 2002). In a similar vein, supportive flexible work practices and other family-friendly programs are more likely to promote employee work satisfaction and retention, benefiting both the employee and the employer (Burke, Oberklaid & Burgess, 2003).

School Characteristics

The specific working environment also has an influence on attraction and retention. Some of the characteristics at this level include the school size, geographical location, the sector type and the socio-economic status of the student population. The geographic location of a school is a key factor that can influence teacher turnover, with teachers in rural and the more remote areas being more likely to leave than their colleagues in urban or metropolitan schools (Ingersoll, 2001b). Much effort is required to retain staff in the regional or remote regions (Miles, Marshall, Rolfe & Noonan, 2003; Dow, 2004). This is particularly so in WA because of the remoteness and lack of facilities in the rural areas. The socio-economic level of where the

school is located is a contributor as well. For instance, research in the United States of America suggests that high poverty public schools experience higher levels of turnover than the more affluent public schools (Bryke, Lee & Smith, 1990; Hare, Heap & Raack, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Ingersoll, 2003). Research in other industries shows that employees tend to identify more with smaller groups (Tyson, 2006), however, for schools, teachers seem to prefer larger school environments to smaller ones (Ingersoll, 2001a) as there is often more support both within and outside the organisation.

Organisational Conditions

A workplace that is interested in and provides suitable conditions of employment and rewards employees as professionals seems to be in a better position to retain good people (Fullan, 2001). The internal work conditions can be divided into working conditions and relationships. Conditions refer to the compensation structure and level of administrative support, whereas working relations refer to the degree of conflict and strife within the organisation and the extent of employee input and influence over organisation policies (Ingersoll, 2001b). Another contentious issue is salaries.

Although the starting salary for teachers is comparable to other professions, teachers reach the top of their salary scale eight to eleven years after entering the profession (DEST, 2003). This compares poorly against many other professions that not only have higher salary progressions during this period, but also have greater opportunities for promotion. Once teachers reach the top of their salary range they may stay on this rate until retirement unless they choose an alternative pathway, such as taking up administrative duties (Australian Senate Employment Education References [ASEERC], 1998). So a lack of diverse opportunities in work and disadvantages in earnings and promotions can work together and contribute to why teachers leave the profession (Buckingham, 2008).

Another reason for teacher attrition may be the work environment and often cited is the inadequate support from administrators (Billingsley, 1993; Hare et al., 2001; Ingersoll, 2001b) and non-involvement of teachers in decision-making (Billingsley, 1993). The Education Department recognises these challenges and is already starting to do something about this; for example, Sharyn O'Niell, the Director General of Education WA (Department of Education Annual Report, 2010-11) has already indicated there will be greater devolution of decision-making to the schools and this will include more autonomy in relation to staffing decisions. There is considerable evidence in the literature that building a supportive, positive non-'toxic' environment where reliability and trust are high, enriches employees and helps to generate a sense of comradeship that in turn helps to retain employees (Abbasi & Hollman, 2000; Dobbs, 2000). Alternatively, disruptive social and professional interactions in schools will lead to higher turnover (Norton, 2001) and this can be seen in the attrition of teachers because of disciplinary problems with students (Ingersoll, 2001a).

Lack of job satisfaction is another reason teachers leave (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Webster et al., 2004). Job satisfaction could influence how employees perceive the relationship between their work role and the fulfilment of values important to them (Locke, 1996; Bunting, 2005). Teachers' response to the absence of job satisfaction is no different; many resign from their positions (Ornstein & Levine, 2006). One source of dissatisfaction amongst teachers is their inability to balance work with non-work commitments (Kyriacou & Coulthard, 2000; Webster et al., 2004). Balancing the inside work and outside work life of an employee is important for schools and providing flexible work arrangements can help (Fisher, Schoenfeldt & Shaw, 2006). Another source of dissatisfaction is the perceived drop in the status of teaching as a profession (Council for the Australian Federation [CAF], 2007; Fullan, 2001) and this is a particular problem in Western Australia.

The decision to leave the teaching profession may also be due to stress from fatigue and frustrations (Go`mez-Mejia, Balkin & Cardy, 2004; Cooper, 2006). A job-related stress develops because of the employees physiological and psychological responses towards a type of condition or stressor at the work place (Zellars, 2002). Within the school context, stress could be created by the need to produce detailed paper work (Fullan, 2001), teaching subjects out of their individual field of expertise (McConney & Price, 2009) and changing standards for assessing student performance which may be time-consuming and difficult to implement (Department of Education and Training Western Australia [DETWA], 2003; Hiatt, 2005; Ornstein & Levine, 2006; Berlach & McNaught, 2007). Despite this, some are clearly happy to remain in the profession.

For this reason we chose to seek feedback from retired teachers, to see if they could provide a different perspective and provide insight into why some teachers stayed in the profession and what more could be done to attract and retain teachers. The retired teachers provide a different and very useful perspective. They fall under the Typical or Atypical participant selection criterion suggested by Veal (2005) because they are typically a set of successful teachers who have completed their career and left the profession by natural attrition, or had taken early retirement. Their experience and the fact they are no longer employed places them in a unique position to make observations about the profession with the benefit of some distance from the day to day engagement of an employee. To give balance to the opinions of these teachers, we also sought some feedback from serving teachers in the public school sector to see if there were substantial differences in their perceptions. This led to the following research questions. *Why are people attracted to teaching, i.e. why do they become a teacher and why do they stay or go?* The second question asked: *What strategies could be implemented to improve attraction and retention rates within the profession of teaching?*

Method

The overall methodology employed was qualitative. A qualitative research approach is well suited to tackling complex social processes that require systematic investigation in their natural setting (Gomm, Hammersly & Foster, 1989; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Qualitative methods comprise an array of interpretive techniques based on the assumption that reality is socially and subjectively constructed, rather than objectively determined. Hence, the qualitative researcher studies things in their natural settings and tries to explain a phenomenon according to the meanings people give to it through the use of interpretive practices (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Veal, 2005). This approach fits with the constructivist paradigm.

The decision regarding which research method to adopt is typically governed by the paradigm or fundamental beliefs that shape the perception of the subject (Burrell, Gibson, Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Collis and Hussey (2003) discuss two extreme paradigms at opposite ends of a continuum; these being positivist and objective at one end, or phenomenologist and subjectivist at the other extreme. As the aim was to construct a picture of the teachers' reality, a qualitative approach based in the constructivist paradigm, was deemed most appropriate for this study. As recommended by Guba and Lincoln (2005) and Patton (2002) this draws on the collective view of the respondents to reconstruct their understanding of the issues.

Gathering qualitative data allows for contextually rich insights and understanding to be drawn from a relatively small sample as recommended by Gomm et al. (1989), Marshall and Rossman (1989) and Denzin and Lincoln (2000). Data was gathered in late 2006, via two separate data-gathering procedures. One was an in-depth interview with retired teachers and the second was a survey of current practising teachers. A mixed design was chosen as it was convenient and allowed information to be gathered from a variety of respondents, which adds

rigour, breadth, complexity and richness to the inquiry. In line with the recommendations of Denzin and Lincoln (2005) this also allows for some statistics and graphs to provide insights and understanding of the data, to demonstrate both the variance and commonality across respondent answers. All data was collected on-line as this is a low cost option (Meho, 2006) that facilitates access to geographically dispersed participants (Im & Chee, 2006). One disadvantage is that it can reduce non-verbal cues, but this is balanced against having more time, less pressure and respondents using their own voice (Meho, 2006).

A request for voluntary participation was posted to the WA Retired Teachers' web page. Those who elected to participate in the study were directed to a second site via a hyperlink, so that responses were redirected to the researcher's e-mail address by an automatic web-e-mail trigger. Respondents to the cross-sectional survey of active teachers were invited to participate via a notice placed on the West Australian Department of Education (DET) website. These respondents were from public schools, as this is where shortages are most prevalent. All qualitative responses were categorised and tabulated via a deductive process to build descriptions of the themes that emerged. This involved examining and categorising the gathered qualitative data into themes and sub-themes under each issue covered in the different interview questions. The quantitative data was analysed non-parametrically with central tendency computations to determine the typical and most frequent responses. Median data were used to obtain the representative responses and mean or mode values were used as secondary ranking criteria to break a tie if this occurred. Cross tabulations were also used to see if there were different patterns among the groups and whether a relationship existed between the variables as recommended by Ary, Jacobs, Ravavich and Sorensen (2006).

Measures

Open-ended questions were used to solicit the retired teachers opinions on what attracted them and others to teaching, why some teachers leave and what strategies could improve the attraction/retention problems. Examples of these questions are "*Please explain why you think people are attracted to teaching?*" and "*What attracted you to teaching?*" In addition, questions were asked about the working conditions; for example, "*How important is professional development in the attraction and retention of teachers?*". Respondents were also asked to rank 7 items that were identified in the literature as factors contributing to the attraction and retention of teachers. These included the working conditions, school conditions, living conditions in the school location, curriculum and extraneous demands, alternative employment opportunities, personal characteristics of teachers, and perceptions about the attractiveness of teaching.

The electronic survey of current practising teachers asked for both quantitative and qualitative responses. Responses to eighteen questions were rated using Likert type scales, where 1 measured *least or not important*, 5 measured *moderately important* and 10 measured *very important*. These questions asked about items that attracted individuals to enter the teaching profession, such as the intellectual stimulation, interest in working with children and job security. Sample questions about attraction included "*I enjoy working with children*" and "*Teaching is intellectually fulfilling*". Ten statements about general strategies to improve teacher retention followed and respondents were asked to rank these from 1 to 10, using the same values as for the Likert type scaling of the previous set of questions. These statements referred to working conditions and practices, career progression, support and working locations. A sample of these statements included "*need more competitive salaries*", "*give Principals more choice in staffing*" and "*provide more trained classroom assistants*". A further five statements relating to strategies to retain early career teachers asked respondents to rank these from 1-5, with 5 being the highest ranked item. A sample of these statements included

“Confirm employment for high achieving graduates early”, “Provide more support and professional development to early career teachers” and “Provide mentors to early career teachers”. Respondents were asked to indicate if their preferred location for teaching was in a metropolitan, rural or remote location and whether they intended to continue as teachers in the short, medium or longer term. The demographic data collected about both sets of respondents included the sector of employment, subject area, employment duration as a teacher, gender and age range.

Sample

Five retired teachers participated in the interviews. All were over fifty years of age. One was female and four were male. There was an equal mix of teachers with metropolitan and regional school location experiences (80% each), 40% had taught in remote regions and all participants had over 21 years teaching experience. Thirty-one active teachers participated in the survey. Of these 31 respondents, 71 per cent were female and 29 per cent were male. Their experiences ranged from less than five years to more than 21 years in the teaching profession. Seventy four per cent taught in Metropolitan schools and 26 per cent were from Regional and Remote areas. Early career teachers (aged 20 – 30 years) made up 26 per cent of participants, 23 per cent were aged between 31 – 40 years, 32 per cent were between 41 – 50 years and 19 per cent were over 50 years.

Results and Findings

The 5 participating retired teachers (coded as RT1- RT05) agreed that they went into the teaching profession because it helped them contribute to society through imparting skills to students. Some enjoyed working with children, others referred to educational and personal values, whilst some cited other reasons such as reasonable salaries, flexible hours, and sufficient holidays. Specific comments from the retired teachers on what attracted them to teaching include: “*the freedom to be somewhat autonomous, the non-office environment ...*” (RT03); and *the holidays, desire to impart knowledge, working with children or youth, money ...; adventure...*” (RT04). They cautioned that, “*many new teachers today do not go into teaching for the right reasons. It is usually because of their (low) tertiary entrance ranking score ...*” (RT02); *many people are attracted by starting salaries and long holidays, with medium-term opportunities to travel/work overseas. Very few are interested in the intrinsic or social value of education*” (RT05).

Drawing on information from the literature, the retired teachers were asked to rank what they believed were the most important factors influencing teacher attraction and retention. The rank order was derived from the mean score of the five participants in each category. The results of this are shown below in Table 1.

Retired teachers	RT.1	RT. 2	RT. 3	RT. 4	RT. 5	Mean
1. Working Conditions	2	5	1	1	1	2
2. School Conditions	3	4	2	4	3	3.2
3. Perceptions about Teaching	1	6	4	3	6	4
4. Living Conditions	5	3	3	6	4	4.2
5. Alternative Employment	6	1	5	5	5	4.4
6. Personal Characteristics	4	2	6	2	2	3.2

Table 1: Rank order of factors most important for teacher attraction and retention

'Working conditions' were considered most influential for teacher attraction and retention. Issues that relate to this grouping include compensation, reward and/or recognition schemes, career progression, effective professional development, fair appraisal and performance management of teachers. The 'personal characteristics of teachers' were ranked second and this confirmed the importance of intrinsic motivational drivers for teacher retention. 'School conditions' also ranked highly and inherent within this is the importance of a strong and positive culture. Another topic that was raised by each of the respondents, although it was not ranked or considered more important than the other factors, were the demands of the curriculum and other demands on teacher's time, such as undertaking administrative or extra-curricular responsibilities.

The reasons the active teachers gave as to why people were attracted to teaching are shown in Table 2. These are grouped into the three categories of intrinsic, conditional and extrinsic reasons.

	Reasons	Mean	Median
Int.	I enjoy working with children	8	10
Int.	Teaching is intellectually fulfilling	7	8
Int.	Teaching helps me contribute to society	7	8
Int.	Teaching allows me to work in a subject area I love	8	8
Int.	Teachers have a positive impact as role models	7	8
Ext.	Teaching offers me flexible hours and sufficient holidays	7	8
Int	Schools offer educational values	6	7
Cond.	My career as a teacher suits my family needs	6	7
Ext.	Teaching offers me opportunities for professional development	6	6
Ext.	Teaching offers good job security	5	6
Cond.	My own school experiences attracted me to teaching	5	5
Ext.	Teacher's salaries and benefits are very reasonable	5	5
Ext.	Teaching provides an opportunity to travel	5	5
Ext.	The profession offers good promotional prospects	4	4
Ext.	Teachers receive positive acknowledgements from society	3	3
Int.	My religious values influenced my decision to teach	2	1
Cond.	A teaching recruitment campaign attracted me to teaching	2	1
Ext	Access to curriculum materials benefits me as a parent	3	1

Table 2: Reasons participants were attracted to teaching

NB: Reasons are ranked as: Intrinsic – Int.; Conditional – Cond.; Extrinsic - Ext.

The active teachers who participated in the survey were asked to rate the level of importance they attached to each of the eighteen reasons people are attracted to the teaching profession, on a scale from 1 – 10 (from least to very important – very important 8 - 10, moderately important 4 - 7 and least important 1 - 3). Responses were evaluated using the median, which is the best indicator of a typical measure, as the ranking criterion and arranged in order of importance from the most critical to the least critical.

The five top reasons for being teachers (which were high in importance) were intrinsic ones, such as the joy of working with children, teaching as intellectually stimulating, or making a contribution to society, although twenty-eight per cent and eleven per cent respectively thought they were only moderately or least important. Interestingly, this lower eleven per cent indicated they were teaching because it suited their family needs or provided an opportunity to travel.

Generally the extrinsic motivators, such as opportunities for professional development, job security and salaries and benefits, were found to be mostly moderately important. This suggests these aspects are important even for participants who had ranked the more intrinsic reasons as very important. Even when considering age differences it was still apparent that the intrinsic motivators were still the most important drivers in attracting each age group to the profession.

Why do Teachers Leave the Profession?

The retired teachers made a number of comments and these have been allocated into the various themes explained below.

Working Conditions

Participants pointed to inadequate reward for individual achievements, and poor salaries and conditions relative to other professions.

School Conditions

Poor discipline in schools, and in the public sector there emerged concern that the government is not giving teachers a sufficiently free hand to handle this issue. Participants stated that, *“more needs to be done in schools with behaviour. Very often teachers get no back up ... children are doing as they like.”* (RT02) “Another participant commented, *“...there is a lack of support in many schools for behavioural management problems. If only state schools could expel students as easily as is done in private schools there would be much less of a problem.”* (RT05) There is also the issue of lack of respect for teachers and their views. Furthermore, there was the issue of school leadership. Participants were of the opinion that in some cases school leadership is under stress. Sometimes there is an absence of management - teacher aligned objectives, with administrators pursuing self-motivated goals.

Perception that Teaching is Unattractive

There is the low profile of the teaching profession in the eyes of the community. A retired teacher participant stated *“teaching needs to be seen as a worthwhile profession and I don't mean WACOT (Western Australian College of Teaching). Somehow it needs upgrading in the community”* (RT02).

Living Conditions

Problems arise from living in the countryside. Unfortunately, country postings appear to be implemented in a bureaucratic manner that does not consider family commitments. As a retired teacher participant recalled, *“my wife and I spent 3 years in a remote location. I was posted to Narrogin (215 kilometres to the Southwest of Perth) and then to Tom Price (1047 kilometres North, in the Pilbara). No one cared. They moved us out to remote areas because of a staffing formula!”* (RT04).

Alternative Employment Opportunities

The participants suggested that teachers who leave to go to alternative professions appear to be those who came into teaching for the ‘wrong reasons’. As already mentioned, some study education because of their low TER score. One retired teacher participant highlighted that *“the universities are at fault for enrolling for money grants anyone who will do the Ed Degrees”* (RT01).

Future Turnover Intentions

Of the current active teachers who participated in the study, twenty-nine per cent desired an immediate change of career from teaching and, of those with up to 5 years' experience, sixty-six per cent indicated they wanted to leave the profession within 5 years. Seventy per cent of those with 5 – 10 years' experience wanted to leave within 5 years. Of the teachers with 21 years or more experience, forty per cent wanted a career change. Fifty per cent of those in the 11 – 15 years' experience range intended to stay until retirement. All the teachers with 16 – 20 years' experience wanted a career change. Further analysis examined the relationship between the participants' personal characteristics and their intentions to stay or leave the profession and found respondents wishing to 'leave now' placed the least importance on intrinsic factors, while those wishing to stay attached a relatively higher degree of importance to the intrinsic factors. Similarly, the participants who wished to stay appeared to appreciate their current salary and benefits more than those who wished to leave. There was no discernible difference in the conditional factors or reasons.

Discussion

The retired teacher's contributions were important to this research as this group had been long-serving teachers. When asked to identify the critical attraction and retention factors for teachers in order of importance, they identified working conditions, followed by the personal characteristics of teachers, and the school conditions and living conditions in the school location. Their fifth ranked issue was the perception that teaching was unappealing or unattractive as a job or profession and this was followed by alternative employment opportunities. The retired teachers added another category related to working conditions and the school environment, which included issues such as the curriculum and other work-related demands. It was interesting to note that when these motivators were related to attraction and retention separately, the dominant attraction factors, in order of decreasing importance, were the personal characteristics, the school location, the perception that teaching is unappealing or unattractive, and alternative employment opportunities. This may suggest that their initial ranking was more related to retention, rather than attraction factors. This also matches the finding that the categories that most directly influenced retention of teachers in a school were the working conditions, school conditions, curriculum and extraneous demands. These findings suggest that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators are important; there is not only a need to improve pay and conditions - employee autonomy, support and recognition are also critical.

Perhaps of more interest is the focus on intrinsic motivators. The retired teachers considered these the most important attraction motivators and indicated that they felt that younger teachers were less intrinsically motivated. However, this was not borne out by the results. Intrinsic motivators were the most significant attraction drivers for the active teachers. Most emphasised they were attracted to teaching because of intrinsic personal characteristics, such as enjoying working with children, finding teaching intellectually fulfilling, that teaching helps them contribute to society, teaching a subject they loved, or being positive role models. These personal characteristics strongly influenced their attraction to and intentions to remain in the teaching profession, which matches findings by other researchers (Hunt, 2002; CRTTE, 2003; Skilbeck & Connell, 2003). However, a new finding uncovered in this study is the contrast between those who desired an immediate change of career from teaching and those who wished to remain. Respondents who indicated they wanted an immediate career change placed least importance on intrinsic motivational factors compared to those wishing to remain in the profession. This suggests that far more emphasis needs to be placed on intrinsic motivators when selecting entrants to the teaching profession, and implementing strategies to maintain intrinsic motivation throughout a teacher's career.

The respondents identified a number of extrinsic rewards that need aligning to bolster the intrinsic values. For example, it is very difficult for a teacher to maintain the intrinsic motivational belief that what they do is important if this is not reinforced in the school and by parents and society. Providing opportunities for professional development, good job security, reasonable salaries and benefits, and good promotional prospects can help do this. Another example was about choice of working in remote locations. Many indicated they would be happy to work in remote locations for short duration postings. The issue here is being aware of the needs of the teachers and responding to these more flexibly, to build greater resilience and provide better support for teachers. The perceived low status of teaching, which has also been identified in other studies (Troman & Woods, 2000; Go`mez-Mejia et al., 2004) undermines intrinsic motivation, particularly at low periods during the teacher's career. This applies to other factors that have previously been identified, yet still not sufficiently rectified. For example, poor workplace conditions (Buckingham, 2008) and stress in schools (Fullan, 2001) related to poor social conditions or poor management, increase the stress and challenge for teachers. This is borne out by the retired teachers' emphasis on having the right culture.

The retired teachers agreed teachers were more likely to stay if they felt supported within their subject area, department and school, matching Ornstein and Levine (2006) and Skilbeck and Connell's (2003) findings on the importance of the organisational conditions. Similarly, building a stronger community of practice and providing greater support to early career teachers, as argued by Harding and Parsons (2011), would also make a difference. The retired teachers stressed that poor leadership and the absence of aligned management - teacher objectives also affected retention, whereas reversing these would have the opposite effect. Three of the seven factors they identified are continuing problems; the communities' perception of teaching as a low profile profession, curriculum and extraneous demands in the form of overemphasis on reporting and assessment and the growth of alternative employment opportunities. Joseph (2011) argues that teachers need strategies to help them establish their own identities as teachers, but it needs to go beyond this. If the sector improved leadership, refined the processes of teaching and boosted teacher credibility and standing in society, this would also help teachers to establish their own identity as teachers, and as suggested by our findings, less would leave. Those who became teachers for extrinsic or conditional reasons, such as flexible hours and holidays, suiting family needs or because teaching was the only course they could get into, are still likely to leave. On the other hand, those motivated by intrinsic reasons need improved support to help them remain in the sector.

Given that many of the solutions relate to improving relationships and the culture in schools, there does seem to be a much more active role for effective human resource management (HRM) practices. Selective recruitment and selection, performance feedback, mentoring, as well as training and development, are just some of the many human resource practices that have benefited many other public and private sector organisations (Mello, 2006, Lundy & Cowling, 1996; Armstrong, 2000). It must be acknowledged that the devolution of more responsibility to Principals at the school level is likely to lead to some positive changes and one would hope that this would go far enough to encourage a better fit at the local level. In addition, the Department of Education (DOE) is also providing more human resource management support through consultancies to assist with job design human resource management support and equitable work practices (DOE Annual Report, 2010-11) Implementing this more strategic approach to human resource practices should assist schools to address working conditions. This could include professional development, appraisal and performance management, recruitment and selection and shaping school cultures to develop environments that achieve the desired levels of respect, friendliness and support.

This study does have limitations and among these is a concern about the generalisability due to limited sample sizes, although it is encouraging that these results do match similar studies. In addition, the data was collected during 2006, at a time when Western Australia had a booming resources sector that promoted growth and alternative well-paying jobs. The high

earnings of many unskilled workers in this sector highlighted discrepancies in teacher pay and conditions and did lead some teachers to seek alternative jobs in the private sector (Hiatt, 2007). However, the global economic downturn in 2008/9 has coincided with more graduates accepting teaching positions and fewer teachers retiring or leaving the sector (ABC, 2009). The findings of this study suggest that movement out of the teaching sector in response to the economic cycle is more likely to affect those who entered the profession for extrinsic reasons. On the other hand, changes implemented by the Western Australian Government will make public schools more competitive with the Catholic and Independent schools as an employer.

Attracting and retaining the best Principals for low social-economic status schools is one of such changes. While still at the trial stage, the Department of Education WA is offering incentives to Principals that vary from \$5,853 to \$28,703, though these can be even higher for Principals moving into the regional areas (DOE, 2012). Greater decision-making is also being devolved to the local level. Principals, parents and school communities are taking a more active role in decisions about staffing and Principal selection (DOE, 2012). According to the Director General of the state, the changes will make "a strong system of distinctive public schools which is critical to a cohesive society." (O'Neill, 2012)

Conclusions

The objective of this study was to interrogate the reasons teachers are attracted into and remain in the teaching profession. Understanding the values that underlie their choice may assist in better targeted attraction and improved retention outcomes. This study draws on findings from electronic in-depth interviews with retired teachers over the age of 50 years and an online survey of currently active teachers. The findings suggest that seven factors are most influential in attracting and retaining teachers. Intrinsic reasons tend to dominate the reason teachers are attracted into the profession; however, extrinsic factors such as the working conditions and environment tend to dominate the retention factors. The factors that were most influential in attracting teachers into the profession were their personal characteristics, the school location, the perception that teaching was an unappealing profession and the availability of alternative employment opportunities. The factors that were most influential for teacher retention were predominantly related to the work environment and included the working and school conditions as well as the curriculum and extraneous demands (such as administrative duties) that are placed on teachers. Understanding this split in the attraction and retention drivers provides the opportunity to develop specifically targeted strategies. As has already been established in other industry sectors, those organisations that are best able will employ strategies that attract, retain and motivate talent and become employers of choice (Armstrong & Murlis, 2004). The school sector also has this opportunity if it proceeds to implement strategies which target the above factors.

Perhaps the most positive finding was that the majority of respondents cited intrinsic motivators as the reasons for joining the teaching profession. In addition, the serving teachers who indicated they were motivated by intrinsic needs, also indicated they had a more positive intention to remain within the profession. Thus it would seem that retention is not just about addressing concerns related to the working conditions and work environment, such as salary parity, workload and the work environment, but also about maintaining and nurturing that high level of intrinsic motivation. This study extends previous research by identifying a link between low levels of intrinsic motivation and intent to stay. This is an important finding! It suggests that a better understanding of the complexities of what motivates teachers is fundamental to their attraction and retention and warrants further investigation by researchers. Understanding the relative importance of these can help practitioners prioritise and design appropriate attraction and retention strategies.

Our results identify some very practical strategies that could be both easily implemented and cost effective. For instance, if schools attract teachers that satisfy the right personal characteristics or intrinsic motivation, these teachers would stay in the profession if reasonable extrinsic factors in the form of strategies for enhancing working and school conditions are in place. The relationship between personal characteristics and turnover intentions is useful as these can be identified through 'personal characteristics' surveys to predict the retention potential of a teaching workforce at the school level. Dealing with precipitating factors and implementing strategies to address 'why they leave' would improve retention rates. Improving teacher attraction and retention would assist schools to better achieve their outcomes, thereby benefiting the community as a whole.

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