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## THE CONVERSATION

Academic rigour, journalistic flair



The programs are long and intense, the creativity and relationships aspect of the vocation has been eroded, there is pervasive negativity in the media, and comparatively poor salary and working conditions. Shutterstock

# Seven reasons people no longer want to be teachers

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The oldest profession – teaching – is no longer attractive. The Queensland Deans of Education revealed there have been alarming drops in first preference applications for this year's teacher preparation courses. Queensland has experienced an overall 26% drop. Most alarmingly, UQ reported a 44% plunge. QUT saw a 19% drop.

These figures reflect a national trend. ACU's is down 20% for campuses in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. This follows disappointing interest in 2017. VTAC reported a 40% drop in 2017 compared to 2016. So why don't people want to be teachers anymore? There are at least seven reasons people aren't so keen.

### 1. Teacher education competency fixation

Our best teachers can inspire a student to achieve beyond their wildest expectations. They find the teachable moments and use humour to explain key concepts. They care for their students as individuals and go that extra mile to design their teaching to

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connect with them in meaningful ways. Their assessments are fair and they rejoice with students when they master important ideas.

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These professional attributes are the essence of good teaching. But accredited teacher education programs must be designed around 37 competencies as prescribed by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). These competencies don't address these personal attributes.

Having a competency framework is not so terrible. We need teachers to have observable capabilities to plan assessment, to know content and related ways to teach it. The skills are necessary, but not sufficient. We need the relationships dimension in the teacher education package. The types of things we value in our best teachers are conspicuous by their absence in program accreditation. So why would someone aspire to teach if the interpersonal dimension is lost?

## **2. Standardised testing obsession**

Standardised testing has become a national sport, with PISA and NAPLAN. Much class time is spent preparing students to do well. The stakes are high for the teachers and their schools. While teachers do need to test their students to check on their progress, the national obsession is a problem.



Standardised tests, like NAPLAN, contribute to lack of enthusiasm to take up teaching. Shutterstock

Teachers spend a great deal of time preparing students for these tests. Standardised tests are a unique testing genre, and teachers need to attend to this preparation without abandoning everything else they need to do. This is a challenge, and the first casualty is teacher creativity. International reports also argue this point. Where's the fun in teaching if you don't have scope to be creative?

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### **3. Lack of autonomy**

Finland enjoys attention for their successful education system. Finnish teachers have an open brief to decide what to teach their students and how. In Australia we micromanage and control. The emphasis on play and the arts in Australian schools is lacking.

In Australia, departments of education provide explicit guidance for classes well ahead of time. This means the teaching approach and content is in place even before a teacher meets their students. This undermines the ability for teachers to be responsive and tailor teaching to learners' needs. And so, the professional responsibility of Australian teachers is compromised - making the job seem rather unattractive.

### **4. Work intensification**

Work intensification refers to the increasing range of duties and responsibilities that have been attached to the role of teachers. Teachers report the rewards of teaching are obscured by this, and the crowded curriculum. They are stressed by the range of things they're required to teach and the snowball effect that emerges from increased requirements.

Intensification is due to many factors, not least of which is the expansion of teacher responsibilities to include social skills development previously addressed at home. Teaching is well known to be hard work. Yet, hard work without appreciation or respect is a disincentive.

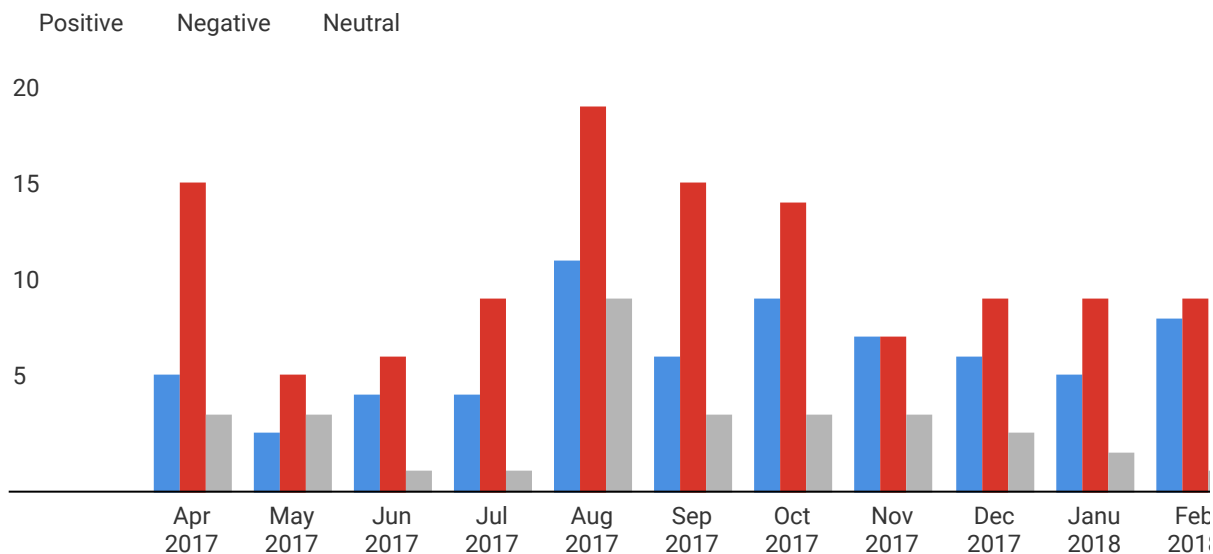
### **5. Negative public image**

An audit of newspaper stories in Queensland over the past year shows a tendency to report negatively on teachers. In the 12 months examined, 11 months featured more negative stories.

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# Sentiment in newspaper articles about teachers

Total news, opinion and editorial articles within the Factiva database with a focus on teachers or teaching methods, April 2017 to March 2018, author classification.



Source: Author provided/Factiva

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## 6. Teacher bashing

Teaching as a vocation is publicly scorned. This is commonly called ‘teacher bashing’. As a career, teaching is tolerated as a convenient backup pathway for people, but not endorsed as the main game. There have even been reports of teachers being actually physically bashed.


## 7. Teachers’ salaries are poor

The final nail in the coffin: poor salaries. A graduate dentist from a five year course earns A\$130,000. The majority of secondary teachers have also completed a five year program, but the starting salary is A\$65,486 reaching A\$71,000 after 5-10 years.

## No wonder people don’t want to be teachers

It’s not surprising, then, that numbers of applicants for teacher education programs have slumped. The programs are long and intense, the creativity and relationships aspect of the vocation has been eroded, there is pervasive negativity in the media, and comparatively poor salary and working conditions.

It’s hard to know where to start, but appealing to the vocational drive of those who love leading others to achieve by raising the profile of these additional attributes in teacher education programs might help. This would require a gentle review of the national program design and accreditation guidelines. Or perhaps we need to be better at reporting teacher success in the mass media.

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