Beginning Teachers' Perception of Their Induction into the Teaching Profession

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Abstract: *Beginning teachers' induction into the teaching profession needs to be personally and professionally fulfilling, which is often not the case. The main objective of this mixed method study was to gain a deeper understanding of beginning teachers' experiences and the perceptions of their induction into the teaching profession and the support they received. A key finding was that many beginning teachers entered the profession through casual or contract positions. Although the beginning teachers reported receiving satisfactory support, the support received varied among schools. Beginning teachers' perceptions of their induction are that the mentor and induction programs are limited. Lack of support, work dissatisfaction and an informal entrance into the profession influences beginning teacher's career plans and thus teacher attrition.*

Introduction

In Australia, an estimated 25 percent of beginning teachers leave the teaching profession within five years of graduating (Hartsuyker, 2007). This high attrition rate of beginning teachers is of concern due to reported world-wide shortages of teachers and predictions that this shortage will increase (Australian Education Union [AEU], 2007; Buchanan et. al., 2013; Ewart, 2009; Ingvarson & Semple, 2006; Painter, Haladyna, & Hurwitz, 2007; Plunkett & Dyson, 2011). Attrition rates in general are high partly due to the ageing population as a substantial proportion of teachers are eligible to retire (Harper, 2007; Huling, Resta, & Yeargain, 2012). Stemming the rate at which beginning teachers leave the profession is necessary to ensure continuity of learning programs and ongoing development of leadership in schools.

For beginning teachers to remain in the teaching profession, their induction period needs to: be personally and professionally fulfilling (Skilbeck & Connell, 2003), offer targeted professional learning (Corbell, Osbourne, & Rieman, 2010), and provide support from mentor teachers (Huling, Resta, & Yeargain, 2012). Accommodating these needs for beginning teachers will assist in counterbalancing the difficulties faced during the first year in the profession, which is frequently described as "a time of survival" (Kutcy & Schulz, 2006, p. 82). Beginning teachers often enter the teaching profession through difficult teaching assignments and conditions that can set them up for failure (Hope, 1999), which in turn influences the retention rate of beginning teachers.

The main objective of the study reported in this paper is to gain a deeper understanding of Tasmanian beginning teachers' views of their induction into the teaching profession. The research questions are:

- What support do beginning teachers obtain and desire?
- What are beginning teachers' perceptions of their induction into the teaching profession?
- Do the beginning teachers' experiences affect their career plans?

Literature Review

Teachers' Career Plans

Beginning teachers are often uncertain about the potential of teaching as a long term career. Harris (2006) conducted a survey in which 1207 teachers from 629 secondary schools around Australia participated. This included both government and non-government schools. Half of these teachers indicated that they were not sure if they would still be teaching in three years' time. Other research (Harris, Jenz, & Baldwin, 2005; Rhodes, Nevill, & Allan, 2004) showed that beginning teachers entering the teaching profession as a second career pathway only envisaged a short term career spanning five to eight years in teaching. This adds to the high turnover of teachers in general.

A large, comprehensive research study by Ingersoll (2001) noted a high level of teacher turnover in the under 30 age group and that teachers were leaving the profession for reasons other than retirement. Ingersoll (2001) attributed the high attrition rates to the dissatisfaction of working conditions. A study by Stinebrickner (2002) contradicted this causation as he found a large number of female beginning teachers who left full-time teaching did not actually re-enter alternative full-time work. He reported the major reason for females leaving the teaching profession was their desire to be at home with their children, with 33 percent of those leaving the profession returning within the 14-year time frame of the study. Other major issues causing dissatisfaction amongst beginning teachers are long hours, high workloads, poor student behaviour, lack of student interest (Harris, 2006; Harris et al., 2005; Ingersoll, 2001), and the disillusion of the public status of teachers (Harris et al., 2005; Kutcy & Schulz, 2006; Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA], 2003; Rhodes et al., 2004).

Employment Opportunities

Teacher employment trends are becoming more non-permanent with an increase in fixed-term contracts (Harris, Jensz, & Baldwin, 2005; Skilbeck & Connell, 2003). There are, however, little data on the percentage of teachers employed in non-permanent teaching positions, both nationally and at a state level. In 2013, the DoE (2013a) reported that 11.7% of Tasmanian state government teachers were on fixed-term contracts. Fixed-term contracts in Tasmania relate to temporary teaching positions of more than twenty working days to one year whereas relief-teaching positions range from 1 day to 20 continuous days (DoE, 2014).

The number of permanent teaching positions available, unfortunately, is not abundant. In 2008, there were only 61 permanent base-grade positions filled in Tasmanian government

schools in the first half of 2009 (DoE, 2009). Among those competing for the positions would have been the 486 teachers who graduated from UTAS in 2008 (Personal communication, L. Stevenson, Jan 23, 2013). Hence, the majority of these graduating teachers would have experienced fixed-term contracts, relief-teaching, and periods of no teaching in their first year in the profession. To assist teachers in gaining permanency, the Department of Education, Tasmania introduced Permanent Replacement Teacher (PRT) status for teachers who gained continuous fixed-term employment for the equivalent of two years (DoE, 2014). The permanency is only granted for the minimum teaching work load gained during the continuous employment period and does not allow for any breaks between contracts.

Part-time, fixed-term contracts and relief-teaching experiences inhibit beginning teachers' ability to gain a sense of belonging and stability, and the opportunity to establish classroom routines and relationships with students, which interrupt the process of becoming an established, confident teacher. Australian and international studies indicate that the informal entrance into the teaching profession limits the opportunities for beginning teachers to perfect their skills (Paris, 2013), build relationships with staff and students (Duggleby & Badali, 2007; Fraser, Draper, & Taylor, 1998), gain support (Ewing & Smith, 2003), and access induction and mentoring programs (Wong, 2004). Social relationships amongst colleague teachers are seen as being a "highly prized facet of the job" (Fraser et al., 1998, p. 70) as they help create a supportive work environment.

Mentors and Induction Programs

Recommendations from studies that show beginning teachers are exiting the profession at a high rate include the implementation of induction programs and the allocation of mentors (Cahill & Skamp, 2003; Halford, 1998; Harris et al., 2005; Hope, 1999; Huling et al., 2012; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; MCEETYA, 2003; Wong, 2004). For induction and mentor programs to be effective, they need to be structured, comprehensive, and well monitored (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Wong, 2004). In 2007, Hartsuyker recommended that an induction program for beginning teachers be implemented. It was suggested that the induction be a year-long program and include a 20 percent reduction in the face-to-face teaching load, allocation of a trained mentor, and access to a structured and tailored program of professional development for beginning teachers.

The Department of Education, Tasmania (DoE) (2013b) developed a Beginning Teacher Time Release (BeTTR) program, which gives beginning teachers in Tasmanian government schools extra non-contact time to prepare for class and attend professional development opportunities. This program, however, is only available to beginning teachers in their first year of teaching, provided they are in a government school on a permanent or fixed-term contract of at least one school term at 0.5 full-time equivalent workload or more. Some Tasmanian non-government schools have similar induction programs for their beginning teachers. Characteristic of the induction programs is the inclusion of mentors who work closely with the beginning teachers.

Mentors and colleague teachers are known to be key contributors in education degrees to help pre-service teachers build up their teaching confidence through observation and feedback (Beck & Kosnik, 2000; Cahill & Skamp, 2003). Receiving constructive feedback and support throughout the day also assists beginning teachers to deal with issues as they arise (e.g., Halford, 1998; Harris et al., 2005; Hope, 1999; Zepeda & Mayers, 2001). Recognition

and affirmation "facilitates the development of the resilience that is essential if teachers are to thrive in the profession" (Buchanan et al., 2013, p. 126). Mentoring can, however, have its limitations if it is not established properly. This often results in beginning teachers receiving little or no support from mentors (Wong, 2004). An implication of this is demonstrated in a small study conducted by Halford (1998). Although Halford's case study only involved two beginning teachers, one with a mentor and one without, the results are in keeping with the findings of other studies (e.g., Wong, 2004). The mentor in Halford's study was given training, an allowance, and time to support the beginning teacher as required. The beginning teacher who worked with the trained mentor was still working seven years later whereas the one without a mentor left teaching within six months because she felt overwhelmed.

Methodology

This study utilised a mixed methods approach (Creswell, 2003) and thus gathered both quantitative and qualitative data. The data were collected through on-line and hard copy questionnaires. The target population of the study included all beginning teachers who graduated within a five-year period from the Faculty of Education, University of Tasmania and were employed in Tasmanian schools during that time. University of Tasmania provides four-year teacher education degrees and two-year post-graduate teacher education degrees.

The Questionnaire

The first section of the questionnaire included demographic items such as age, gender, degree obtained, year of graduation, and number of years they intended to teach. The second section of the questionnaire collected information about their teaching experiences. This included the type of employment (*Full-time, Part-time, Relief-teaching*), the area of teaching (*Early Childhood, Primary, Middle School, Secondary*) and the type of school (*Rural, Remote, Urban*). To gain an understanding of their employment preferences, the beginning teachers were also asked if they were looking for teaching positions and if so, the type of employment and school they desired, with multiple answers encouraged.

The final section of the questionnaire gathered data on the beginning teachers' induction into the teaching profession through Likert agreement statements and open-ended questions. The statements were adapted from a survey instrument developed by Rhodes et al. (2004) that incorporated the "Forty facets of professional experience likely to impinge upon job satisfaction or dissatisfaction" (p. 80) and which was shown to be valid using a Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test. The Likert statements were divided into five categories; *School-based Relationships, School Resources and Policies, School-based and General Support, Workload,* and *Job Satisfaction*. The response categories were *Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree* and *Strongly Disagree*.

Open-ended questions were included in the questionnaire to collect qualitative data. Those questions were related to the beginning teachers' expectations of becoming a teacher, the induction opportunities available, and the intended career paths. The participants also had the opportunity to write comments about the issues related to the Likert statements posed in the questionnaire.

Participants and Response Rates

The participants in the study were beginning teachers, who had graduated with teacher education degrees from the University of Tasmania no more than five years prior to the study. Although the target population had the potential to be large (over 1000 graduates), contacting the beginning teachers was problematic. The contact details of graduands are not updated once they graduate. Access to these beginning teachers was therefore limited to those who were employed in the Tasmanian school system at the time of the project.

Paper-based questionnaires were mailed to the principals of non-government schools in Tasmania to be distributed to beginning teachers because it was not possible to gain access to the email addresses of teachers in those schools. Although there was no official way of knowing how many beginning teachers were employed at non-government schools, a total of 225 paper questionnaires were posted to 60 principals of those schools for distribution. There were 42 respondents who completed and returned the non-government questionnaire.

An on-line version of the questionnaire was set up for beginning teachers at government schools. The link to the questionnaire and details of how to access the questionnaire were sent to 600 DoE email addresses. There were 49 respondents who completed the on-line questionnaire. This response rate may have been affected by technical problems that occurred. Although the on-line questionnaire was tested by two university staff members and four pre-service teachers before being activated, which confirmed that the questionnaire could be accessed and completed using the link provided, the respondents experienced issues related to accessing the questionnaire and completing certain sections.

Considering the target population, the number of responses from the questionnaire was not high but somewhat expected due to the difficulty in contacting past graduates. There were a number of other factors that may have contributed to the low response rate. First, the exact number of beginning teachers who were actually employed in teaching positions within Tasmanian school system at the time of the distribution of the questionnaires was unknown. Advertised teaching positions in Tasmania around the time of the questionnaire were somewhat limited as previously stated. Therefore, the response rates may have been low because there was a low number of beginning teachers in teaching positions at the time the questionnaires were distributed.

Second, the DoE email address list for the on-line questionnaire consisted of all graduating teachers who had begun a teaching position in the DoE within five years prior to the administration of the questionnaire. The questionnaire, therefore, would have been sent to recipients who were no longer employed by the DoE, and to fixed-term and relief teachers who were not teaching at a school at the time of the study. Teachers without a current contract at the time would not have had access to the DoE email service. Anecdotal evidence also suggested that not all teachers utilise the school email service, especially teachers in short-term and relief positions. Third, several beginning teachers reported having problems gaining access to the on-line questionnaire. Although this issue was rectified as soon as possible, the impact of this problem on the response rate is unknown.

Another factor to be considered is that questionnaire response rates in general are inconsistent. In this study, the response rate for the paper-based questionnaire was higher than that of the on-line questionnaire. These are consistent with Nulty's (2008) research on questionnaire response rates, which reported paper-based questionnaire response rates were higher than on-line questionnaire response rates. McConkey, Stevens and Loudon's (2003) research focusing on market surveys found that response rates were very disparate, with

several studies stating that email surveys had higher response rates, whilst other studies reported postal mail with higher response rates.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data collected by the questionnaire were processed and analysed to produce descriptive statistics, which included graphs for each of the Likert statements. The qualitative data consisted mainly of short sentence answers, which were categorised into the key themes that were related to the five categories in the Likert statements, *School-based Relationships, School Resources and Policies, School-based and General Support, Workload, and Job Satisfaction,* as well as intended career paths.

Limitations and Delimitations

The sample size of this project is small for a quantitative study. To mitigate this issue, qualitative data are used to corroborate and strengthen the findings gleaned from the quantitative data. In the results, comparisons are made between government and non-government schools in relation to the beginning teachers' intention to teach. These comparisons are used to gain a deeper understanding of the beginning teachers' perspectives of their induction into the teaching profession. It is not the intention of this study to compare the induction programs, support offered, or the benefits provided by the two school systems.

Results

The results from the questionnaire data are presented here under the headings of the five categories of Likert statements in the questionnaire—*School-based Relationships, School Resources and Policies, School-based and General Support, Workload, and Job Satisfaction*—and the open-ended questions—*Expectations of Becoming a Teacher, Induction Opportunities,* and *Intended Career Paths*. Due to the rounding of percentages, some of the graphs do not equal 100 percent. First, the beginning teachers' demographic data are presented. As stated previously, there are different numbers of responses in the result summaries of some sections due to the issues experienced with the on-line survey.

Characteristics of Beginning Teachers

Ninety-one beginning teachers completed the questionnaires; 49 were from government schools and 42 from non-government schools. Of these, 58 were female and 33 were male. There were 39 beginning teachers (43%) from the 4-year teacher education degrees and 52 (57%) from the 2-year post-graduate teacher education degree. The ages of beginning teachers were grouped into 5-year brackets and are shown in Table 1. As expected, the majority of beginning teachers were below 29 years ($n=55$, 60%); however, there was a relatively high number of beginning teachers ($n=13$, 15%) in the 40-44 age group with an overall total of 19 beginning teachers (21%) being over 40 years of age. More than half of the beginning teachers who were over 40 years of age graduated from the post-graduate teacher education degree in secondary studies.

Degree	Four year teacher education degree				Two year post-graduate teacher education degree			
Age Group	Early Childhood	In-Service	Primary	Human Movement	Primary	Middle school	Secondary	*n*
20-24	4		3	4	1	1	4	17
25-29	4	1	5	3	7	7	11	38
30-34	2		1		3		6	12
35-39	1	1	2			1		5
40-44	2	1	2		1		7	13
45-49	1						2	3
50+	1	1					1	3
	15	4	13	7	12	9	31	91

Table 1. Age groups of beginning teachers and degree obtained

Teaching Positions Obtained in Non-government Schools

The beginning teachers from non-government schools who completed this section stated that they had obtained teaching positions in rural (*n*=3), urban (*n*=34), or several teaching positions in both rural and urban (*n*=5) schools. These teaching positions were not necessarily permanent. Only half of these beginning teachers stated that they had gained full-time teaching contracts during the time between graduation and the administration of the questionnaire.

Of the 42 beginning teachers who responded, 30 (71%) were employed in the field of their education study. Seven of these also taught other classes that were out of their field of study. Some of the combinations of teaching positions gained and field of study were:

- four Human Movement graduates were teaching in middle school or secondary maths;
- one Early Childhood graduate was teaching at college level; and
- one post-graduate Secondary graduate, trained in teaching Studies of Society and Environment, was teaching secondary science.

Due to on-line questionnaire issues, this section was not completed by the teachers at government schools.

School Based Relationships

Beginning teachers were, overall, positive about the items in the school based relationship category (Figure 1). In general, the majority of beginning teachers ranked each of these statements as *Strongly Agree* or *Agree*. The beginning teachers responded particularly high in regards to having good relations with other staff members. They also felt that they were able to participate in school decision making and influence school policies. The responses to opportunities for sharing work experiences and resources with other beginning teachers were more diverse with 35% of the beginning teachers disagreeing to some extent.
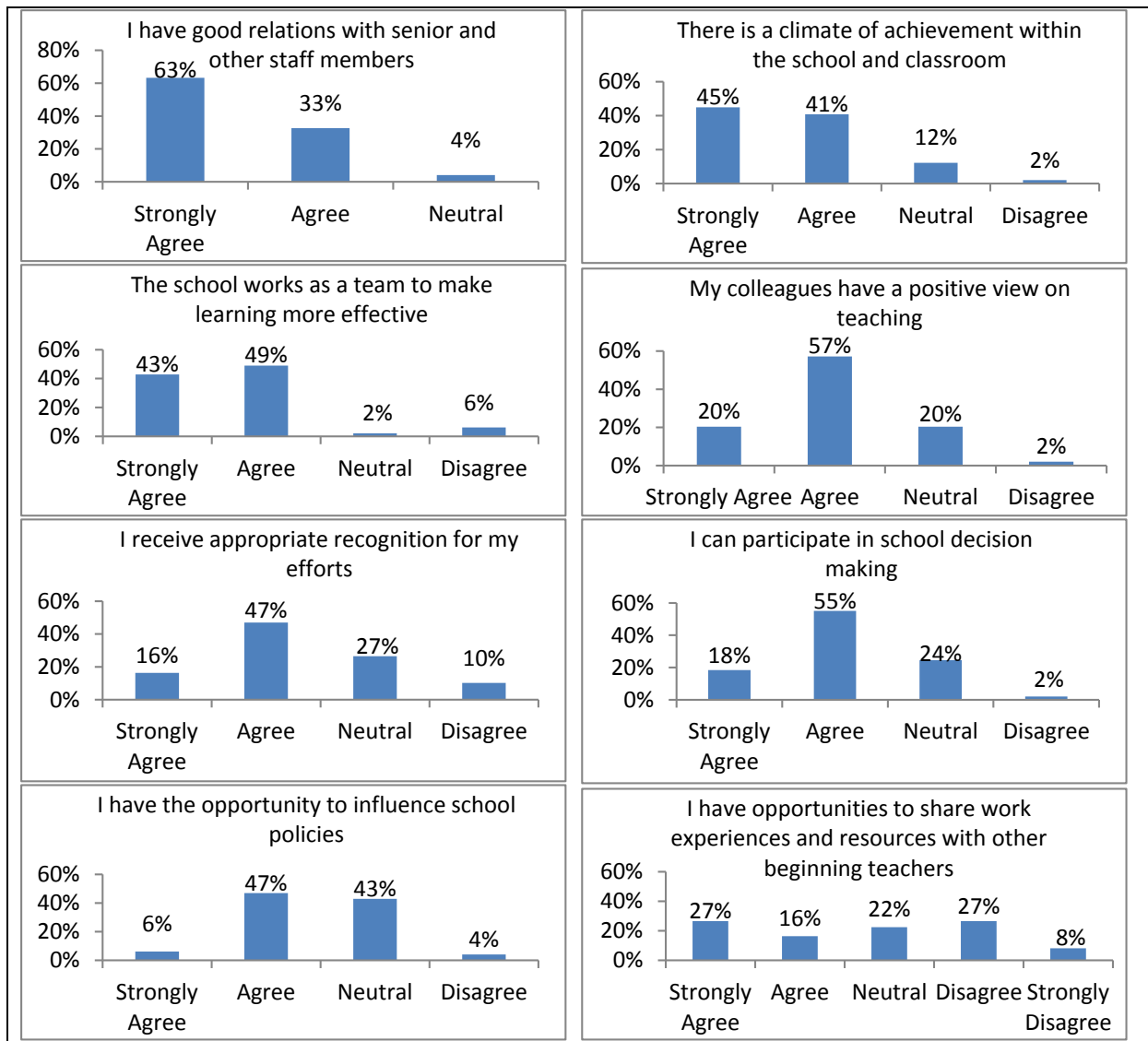
Figure 1. Beginning teachers' responses to support statements based on school relationships

School Resources and Policies

More than half of the responses for school policies supporting teaching and learning, and work environment is in good physical condition and safe were *Strongly Agree* with a further 35% responding with *Agree*. The other statements in this category were generally responded to with *Agree* or *Neutral*. The beginning teachers *Strongly Disagree/Disagree* to the statements that the Professional Development sessions were held at a convenient time (14%) and were relevant to their individual needs (10%), and that they had access to resource to achieve effective curriculum planning (10%). All responses to this category are shown in Figure 2.
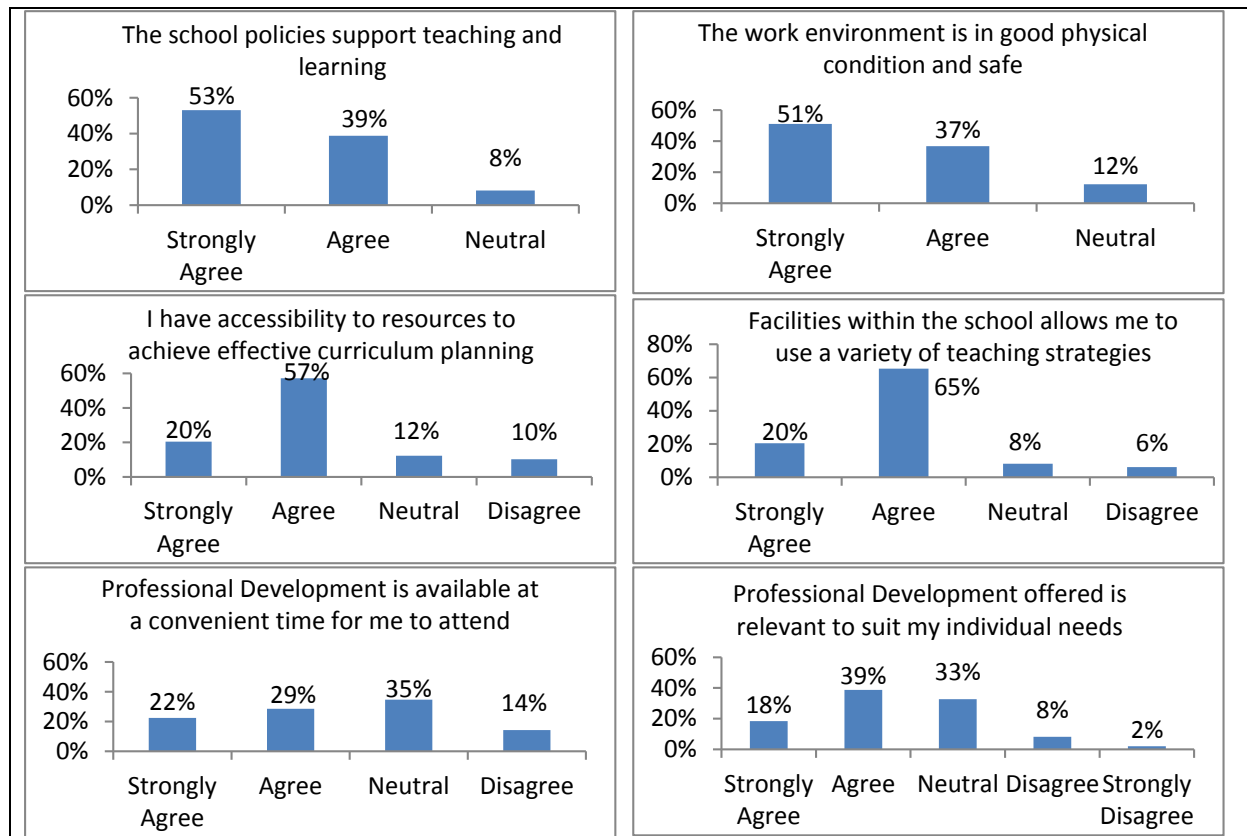
Figure 2. Beginning teachers' responses to support statements based on school resources and policies

School-based and General Support

The responses to the school-based and general support statements are shown in Figure 3. They are more diverse than the responses to the previous categories as all statements have responses from *Strongly Agree* to *Disagree* with four of the six also having *Strongly Disagree* responses. Although the responses are diverse, the majority of beginning teachers agreed to some level to all the statements except for *The federal and state government support teachers,* where 29% of the responses were *Disagree* and a further 6% *Strongly Disagree*. The responses in regard to the general population valuing teachers and their work had 24% *Strongly Disagree/Disagree*. Support received from teachers' assistants/aides statement had 10% of the beginning teachers responding as *Disagree* and a further 2% as *Strongly Disagree*.
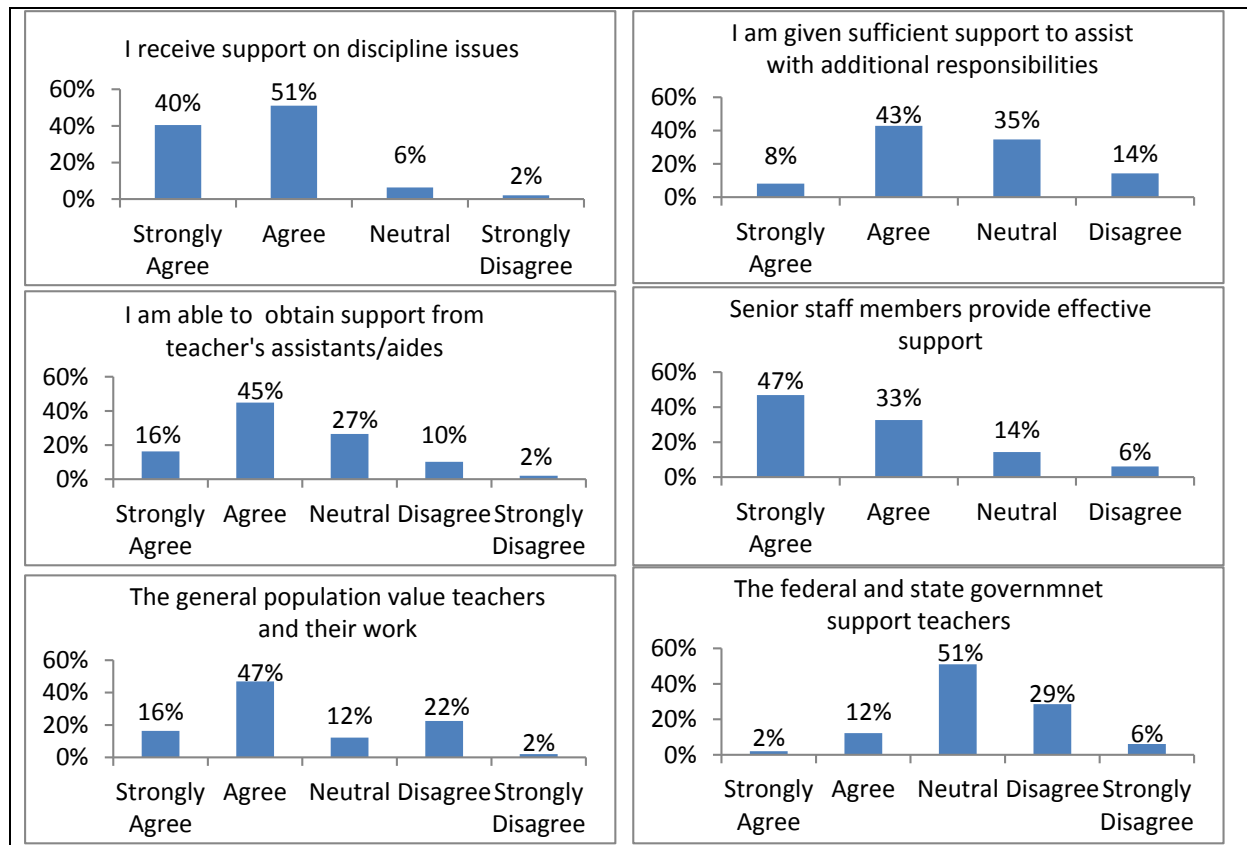
Figure 3. Beginning teachers' responses to support statements based on general support recieved

Induction Opportunites

The comments provided in the open-ended questions on support received provide a rich source of data to illuminate what the Likert scale statements revealed. In terms of the range of specific support mentioned, seven categories were identified: *BeTTR program* (and the equivalent in the non-government schools) (*n=35*) and in particular *Time Release* (*n=6*) and *Formal Mentoring* (*n=31*), *Support from Senior Staff* (*n=22*), *Informal Support from Colleagues* (*n=15*), *Induction Programs Prior to Teaching* (*n=6*), *Good Access to Resources* (*n=5*). In contrast, there were 19 (21%) of the beginning teachers who noted that nothing, or very little, had been provided in the way of support. One student commented, "*there was nothing – no desk, no resources, no room to work in. I had to beg, borrow everything and make it all up as I went along.*"

The DoE BeTTR program, which includes time release and mentoring for beginning teachers, received mixed responses. The beginning teachers who were able to take advantage of the program made the following reports on the benefits that it made to their teaching.

- *Was given some time to do extra things for classroom, reports and had one school visit.*
- *...reduce my load and take up professional development and assist with planning and marking.*
- *BeTTR Time gave me a tiny bit of flexibility to have a little more free time in my first year and to access some PD opportunities.*

- *Relief time given to beginning teachers is great help, however to actually use the time was hard to do when you don't like to leave your class.*

Some beginning teachers reported that it was difficult to access the program as the program was only made available to beginning teachers who were permanent or on fixed-term contracts for at least a term at 0.5 full-time equivalents. Other beginning teachers were unable to access the BeTTR program due to a lack of support from school staff members.

- *I did not receive BeTTR as my principal "forgot" about sending on my form.*
- *BeTTR supervisor away for most of Term 1 and 2 in my first year of teaching so I was not able to access it for most of my first year of teaching.*
- *Waste of time and not really supported by the school.*

Particular difficulties also arose for beginning teachers who were teaching in rural schools:

- *Great, but it was difficult (due to distance from main cities) to get relevant PL*
- *Days had to be fought for as it was hard to get cover in my school.*

Although the data indicated that many schools had provided mentoring opportunities, there seemed to be a disparity as to the level of mentoring received by some of the beginning teachers. In some schools "*... every new teacher at school is assigned a mentor,*" whilst other schools "*... had no official mentoring program – it was up to me to find appropriate people to seek the support I needed.*"

The mentor program available also varied in the extent of services provided. Some beginning teachers had a mentor for each subject whilst other mentors observed classes, or offered suggestions to help with students who were not responding to behaviour management plans.

One of the open-ended questions asked the respondents to comment on any disparities between actual and anticipated teaching experiences. The comments made were related to the lack of school-based support through staff relationships. The following quotation is a typical response to the question.

One area that differed to my expectation was the level of collegial support and mentoring, etcetera that I thought might be available to me was not there. Primary teaching in particular is quite an isolating experience.

Suggestions given on how to improve the support provided related well to what was found in terms of support received. Not unexpectedly, given the data on the BeTTR program, there were suggestions for the BeTTR program to be monitored more effectively to make sure that beginning teachers are actually receiving the benefits offered.

The appointment of mentors was regarded as an area for future improvement by 15 of the beginning teachers. There is, however, a note of caution in this suggestion. Some beginning teachers who had a mentor suggested that the mentor program needs to be improved so that the beginning teacher has "*a mentor with similar behaviour support strategies and teaching styles*" and that "*mentors should have adequate experience*" or training in mentoring. Some beginning teachers reported that their mentor was of little help. For example, "*My mentor had personal issues so was only supportive on occasion.*"

Other improvements suggested included more time-off class (*n=8*), and more chances to network with other beginning teachers (*n=4*). It should be noted that the number of beginning teachers appointed to a specific school is variable especially in rural schools where there can be a high number of new teachers each year. This was exemplified by one beginning teacher who commented that the school had "*six beginning teachers that year and almost half of the staff were new that year which stretched resources to breaking point.*"

Workload

The responses to the statement in this category are diverse and conflicting as seen in Figure 4. Although there were 81% of beginning teachers who *Agree* that the workload was within their capabilities (10% *Disagree*), there were high numbers who *Disagree* on there being sufficient non-contact time for preparation (39%), balance in their work and personal life (26%), balance in administration work (18%), effective number of students in the classroom (20%), and that student behaviour issues are easily handled (12%).
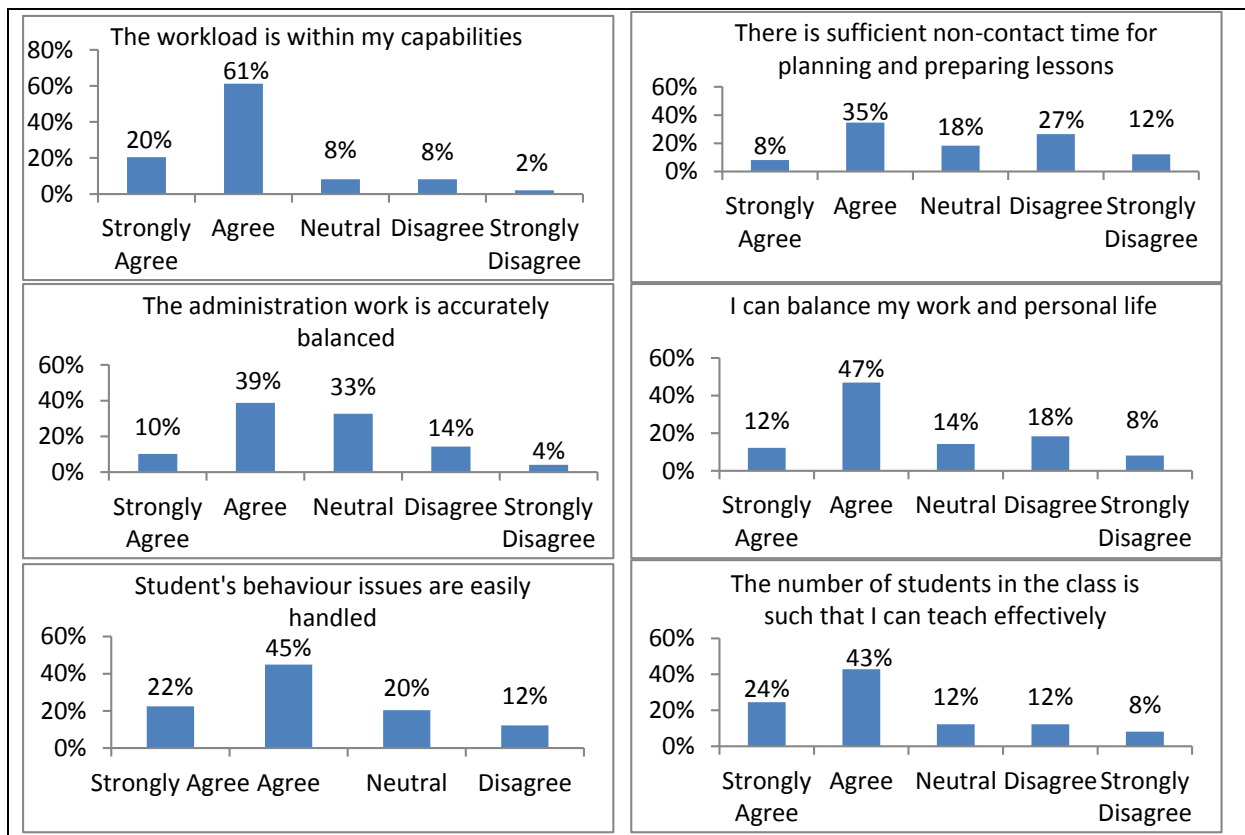
Figure 4. Beginning teachers' responses to workload statements

Expectations of Becoming a Teacher

In the open-ended question on expectations, workload was mentioned by 15 (16%) of the beginning teachers as being higher than expected. For example,

- *I am very stressed, work long hours and feel tired. I feel that teaching is your whole life, not just what you do in work hours.*
- *The hours are longer than ever suggested if you want to be a good teacher*

These comments correlate with the Likert results on workload suggesting that although the workload is within their capabilities, the time required to achieve the outcome they desire may not be practical.

Job Satisfaction

The responses to the statements on job satisfaction were mainly positive as shown in Figure 5. All the beginning teachers enjoyed helping students learn as 82% *Strongly Agree* with this statement. Although 42% *Strongly Agree/Agree* that inclusion students made their job more enriching there were 38% who responded with *Neutral* and 22% who *Strongly Disagree/Disagree*. The majority *Agree* that: the constant changes and initiative levels required for teaching makes the job interesting, they had autonomy over their teaching, there were opportunities for career advancement, and teaching challenged them intellectually. The statement referring to the salary being sufficient for the workload was very diverse with 37% responses being *Strongly Agree/Agree* and 40% being *Strongly Disagree/Disagree*. The response to this statement seems to conflict with the positive response given to the workload being within their capabilities but compatible with the other statements included in the workload category.
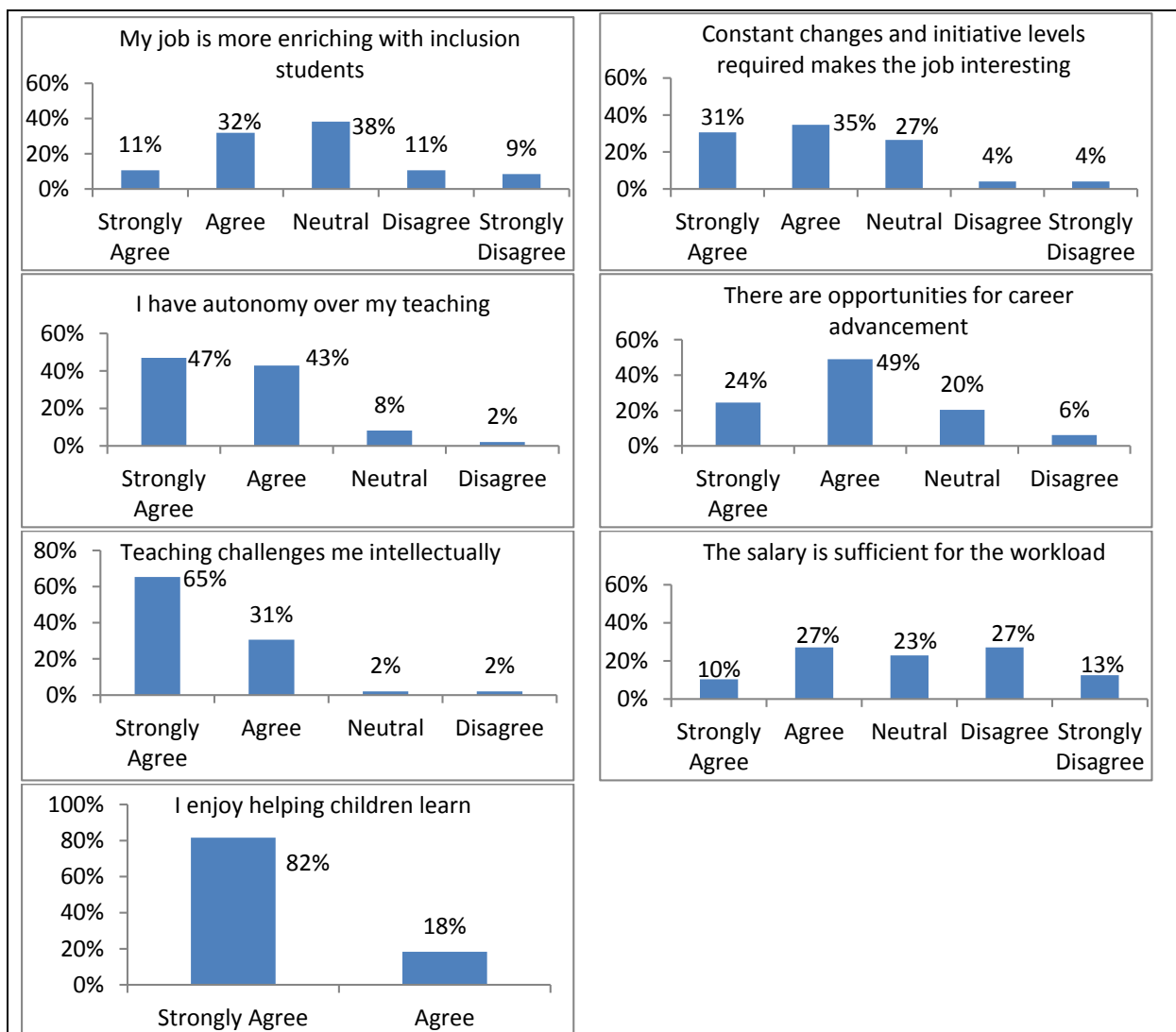
Figure 5. Beginning teachers' responses to job satisfaction statements

Intended Career

To gain an insight into the impact that the induction into the teaching profession has on beginning teachers, the questionnaire asked how long the beginning teachers intended to teach. The reported number of years intended to teach were grouped into 5-year brackets and responses of "until retirement" and "unsure" were grouped separately. A comparison of intended career prior to beginning teaching and after teaching showed that 11 (12%) of the beginning teachers in this study were aiming to teach for less years than originally planned, whereas there were only two (2%) who increased their intended years.

The main reason given for reducing the intended number of years was related to stress issues. This was evident in one of the beginning teacher's remark of being on stress leave for 5 months within a 4-year period. The issue is further exemplified in the following comments.

- *If my stress levels can't be reduced I will need to find another occupation. I love teaching but have been totally drained by bad behaviour and lack of enthusiasm in high school.*
- *I'm not sure if teaching is a job that you could stay fresh and alert to for longer than 20 years! I've also realised how stressful it is and how much work is involved. More than in other jobs.*

Another key factor for beginning teachers to teach fewer years was employment issues. Primarily this was due to the inability to gain permanent employment.

- *I am not confident in being able to get or keep a job.*
- *In my heart I still want to teach until retirement but I feel that the department and other school based pressures may influence a change in career much sooner. If for example I don't receive my PRT status due to another loop hole I will leave the profession this year.*

The demands of beginning teachers in itinerant capacities were also mentioned.

- *I am going to get out the moment I can. I am currently in 4 schools, 2 of which are 80km apart. I am stressed and tired at the age of 25. I didn't realise that the Department of Ed treated its employees so poorly.*

Gaining suitable employment was raised by 11 beginning teachers as being an issue as they were not expecting it to be so difficult to gain a teaching position or to gain PRT status. Two such comments from beginning teachers in government schools were;

- *I had almost continuous contracts, however not quite enough to gain PRT so no job security.*
- *I had no understanding of how difficult it could be to work with the school hierarchy and was not prepared for the erratic nature of employment contracts.*

At the time of completing the questionnaire, a third of the beginning teachers were aiming to remain teaching until retirement age. Table 2 shows that non-government schools had a higher percentage of beginning teachers who were unsure of their teaching expectancy than the government schools, whilst beginning teachers at government schools were more likely to teach until retirement age. There were only seven beginning teachers (8%) who intended to leave the teaching profession within five years. Two of these noted that they intended to leave to have children but were planning to return to teaching in some capacity, in the future.

	1-5 years	6-10 years	11-15 years	16-20 years	21+ years	Until retire	Not sure	*n=*
Non-govt	3	6	3	4	3	13	8	40
Govt	4	5	4	7	5	21	4	50
	7	11	7	11	8	34	12	90

Table 2. Intended years in teaching career by school sector

Discussion

Employment Opportunities

Although there have been reports of teacher shortages (e.g., Ewart, 2009; Harper, 2007; Ingvarson & Semple, 2006), only half of the beginning teachers employed in the non-government sector had gained fulltime employment over the five year period of this project. These full-time positions were not necessarily permanent. Some of the beginning teachers also found it difficult to obtain the six continuous terms of teacher employment in government schools to allow them to reach permanent replacement teacher status as stipulated by the DoE (2014). One teacher was currently employed in 4 schools, 2 of which were 80 kms apart. These issues created disillusionment among some of the beginning teachers. Of the non-government beginning teachers, 29% were employed to teach in content areas outside their field of study. Being employed outside of the field of study is a concern that has been created by the teacher shortage in certain subjects and in rural and remote schools (e.g., Kutcy & Schulz, 2006).

Induction Programs

There were examples of schools where the beginning teachers felt very supported as they had access to mentoring, were able to share resources, and had access to the BeTTR program. There were other schools where support was limited or non-existent. There were, however, a few common occurring areas of concern that were not only noted as concerns by beginning teachers but also mentioned as areas for improvement. Areas of concern include; government support, being valued by the general population, lack of employment opportunities, the heavy workload, and gaining access to professional development, mentoring and induction programs.

Beginning teachers in this study did not feel supported by the government or valued by the general population. Kutcy and Schulz (2006) showed that beginning teachers were frustrated with the politics and policies associated with teaching, parents and administrators, and the impact these frustrations had on their personal lives. Other studies also showed the disillusionment of teachers with the public status of teachers (Harris et al., 2005; Kutcy & Schulz, 2006; MCEETYA, 2003; Rhodes et al., 2004). The beginning teachers in this study did not comment directly on the lack of government support, however, there is an indication of their concerns in their responses in relation to the difficulties they were experiencing in obtaining and retaining teacher employment. Professional development was a concern in terms of both the formal organised sessions for a particular subject and the informal aspects such as interactions with peers and opportunities to share ideas and resources. The responses showed that the formal professional development sessions were often conducted at an

inconvenient time or were not relevant to the beginning teachers' needs, thus reducing their effectiveness as noted by Sprague (2007). The beginning teachers also noted a lack of opportunities to share their work experiences and resources, which is of particular importance to beginning teachers (Wong, 2004).

Mentors help pre-service teachers and beginning teachers to build their teaching confidence through observation, constructive feedback, and support throughout the day (Beck & Kosnik, 2000; Buchanan et al., 2013; Cahill & Skamp, 2003; Halford, 1998; Harris et al., 2005; Hope, 1999; Zepeda & Mayers, 2001). Although it appeared that most schools involved in this study provided mentors for their beginning teachers, the level of support received from the mentors varied. In some schools, every beginning teacher was allocated a mentor whilst beginning teachers in other schools were only encouraged to find someone who would be able to provide appropriate support. The level of benefit received from mentors also varied, from having a mentor for each area of teaching, to having a mentor of little benefit. This reflects Wong's (2004) article which states a quarter of beginning teachers receive little or no support from their mentors. Beginning teachers need advisers or mentors who have time to observe their teaching and are easily contactable (Wong, 2004), and know how to mentor effectively and efficiently as suggested by the beginning teachers in this study.

The beginning teachers with access to formal induction programs, such as BeTTR, benefitted from having mentors and class release time. The release time was used to attend professional development, prepare lessons, complete marking and report writing, such systematic support to beginning teachers in a variety of ways was suggested by Zepeda and Mayers (2001). The BeTTR program is, however, only available to beginning teachers who had permanent or fixed-term contracts with the state government schools for at least one term at 0.5 full-time equivalent teaching load or more. This was compounded by other issues such as availability of relief teachers in rural areas, distance required to attend professional development, and the schools' support of the program. Although the BeTTR program contains multiple components, it appears to lack a good monitoring system as suggested by Ingersoll and Smith (2004) and Wong (2004), creating unequal access by beginning teachers.

It has been well reported (e.g., Harris et al., 2005; Rhodes et al., 2004) that teachers, including beginning teachers, have issues with the work load involved in being a teacher. It has been suggested by MCEETYA (2003) that key problem areas, such as class sizes and workload, need to be improved. Although most of the beginning teachers in this study agreed that the workload was within their capabilities, 39% commented that the non-contact planning time was insufficient, 26% found it difficult to balance their work and personal life, and 18% did not think the administration work was accurately balanced. It was even stated by one beginning teacher that "the hours are longer than ever suggested if you want to be a good teacher." To some degree, the beginning teachers also had issues coping with the number of students in the class (20%) and the students' behaviour issues (12%). MCEETYA (2003) suggested that the number of teacher assistants in schools be increased to ease the workload of beginning teachers yet only 61% of the beginning teachers in this study felt they were able to obtain support from their teachers' aides and assistants.

Teachers' Career Plans

Issues such as stress, workload, classroom situation, and lack of secure employment opportunities were given as factors influencing early departure from the teaching profession. This reflects the findings of Ingersoll's (2001) study, which states that the attrition rates are

high due to the dissatisfaction of working conditions. This is supported further by few beginning teachers (37%) agreeing that the salary was sufficient for the workload demands, even though 81% agreed the workload was within their capabilities and they all enjoyed helping children learn. Two beginning teachers were planning to take leave in the near future to start a family with intentions of returning. This is in keeping with Stinebrickner's (2002) study that found women return to teaching after leaving for family reasons. It should also be noted that there were relatively high number of teachers in the 40 year old and over age group. This suggests that not all teacher education students are entering their first occupation and may not expect to have a lengthy teaching career.

Conclusions

This study shows that the support beginning teachers receive is not available equally to all beginning teachers. All beginning teachers, whether they begin with permanent employment, short-term contract, or relief work, require equal access to an induction program, such as BeTTR program, at some stage of their entry into the teaching profession. The induction program should include systematic support from a variety of sources, such as mentors *and* structured professional development tailored to their needs, as recommended by Hartsuyker (2007).

Beginning teachers need a mentor who can help support them in the early stages of teaching, and if the beginning teacher is teaching in multiple schools or departments within a school, several mentors may be required. To improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the current mentoring system, training should be established for experienced teachers to increase their understanding of their responsibilities and to develop their mentoring skills. Experienced teachers also need to be prepared to provide the support the beginning teachers require before taking on the responsibility of being a mentor. Mentors also require time-release to cater for the added responsibilities of being a mentor. This would ensure that the mentors are more readily available for the beginning teachers, particularly in observing the beginning teacher's pedagogy to provide critical feedback.

The way in which professional development is delivered to beginning teachers also needs to be reconsidered. Time allocation is a difficult issue for beginning teachers as they adapt to the new profession, especially if they are teaching across different schools. Beginning teachers employed on short-term contracts, permanent part-time basis or relief duties are often unaware of professional development opportunities. To rectify this, professional development could be made available in an on-line format. This could be in the form of a chat room especially for beginning teachers to discuss their daily issues and to share ideas on topics and behavioural management. The on-line chat room could also include experienced teachers who are willing to offer advice and resources.

The issue of beginning teachers being valued and supported by the government and the general population extends beyond the realms of beginning teachers and teacher education providers. Putting strategies in place such as a campaign to improve the status of teachers, and a government assessment of how teachers gain employment, their work loads and pay rates, would benefit all teachers in general.

The current entry into the teaching profession involves accepting part-time and contracted positions and needs to be recognised as such by teacher education providers and students. The DoE in Tasmania (2014) has introduced the permanent replacement teacher (PRT) status to help assist with this issue. A percentage of teachers seeking to obtain this

status are, however, still unable to gain PRT status, even at a part-time level, within the first five years of teaching due to the non-continuous nature of fixed-term contracts and relief-teaching assignments.

Beginning teachers' experiences upon entering the teaching profession do influence their intentions to remain in the teaching profession and are therefore of importance in retaining teachers. The costs involved in replacing a beginning teacher include recruiting and educating more beginning teachers, the hiring process, orientation programs, and professional development. Benner (2003) researched several models of calculating monetary attrition cost and concluded that the associated cost of replacing a beginning teacher was around 20% of a the leaving teacher's annual salary. Therefore, using the base entry pay, the attrition cost for each beginning teacher leaving the teaching profession in Tasmania would be in excess of AU$15,000. This attrition cost does not include other important factors such as disruption to students' learning, or losing the personal and professional knowledge of the exiting teacher. Creating an induction program including the features described in this article and that is equally available to all beginning teachers would be more effective and cost efficient than replacing teachers leaving the profession.

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