

I

Once a Teacher – Always a Teacher?

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Honestly, seeing my students truly learn is what makes me happy – seeing the light go on, the sense of achievement, and the confidence that comes from mastering something.

There's a lot I love about being a teacher. Teaching is one of those rare professions that keep your brain young, allowing you to continue your own journey as a student and a lifelong learner. We as educators speak often about creating lifelong learners, but if we aren't buying into it ourselves, then our students don't stand a chance (American teacher). (<https://www.edutopia.org/users/heather-wolpert-gawron>).

I would love to teach, but I will not spend another day under the expectations that I prepare every student for the increasing numbers of meaningless tests that take advantage of children for the sake of profit. I refuse to subject students to every ridiculous standardized test that the state thinks is important.

I would love to teach, but I will not spend another day wondering what menial, administrative task I will hear that I forgot to do next.

I would love to teach, but I'm tired of my increasing and troublesome physical symptoms that come from all this frustration, stress, and sadness (American teacher) (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/wp/2012/10/29/letter-from-disgusted-teacher-i-quit/>)

The above quotes represent two teachers, one, who has maintained a strong motivation for teaching and wants to make a difference in her students' lives. The other loves teaching, but she is disillusioned and demotivated to stay in the profession due to the many external pressures which make it

impossible for her to do a proper teaching job. They were both strongly motivated to become teachers, they both completed a demanding education in preparing for the profession, but this is not enough to stay in the profession. Once a teacher, does not mean always a teacher. In this paper I will discuss why people choose to become teachers based on international and national research. However, an alarming number of teachers leave the profession prior to retirement age, and the paper will discuss why teacher attrition is given increased attention by researchers as well as by policy makers. To continue with a more optimistic view, the paper will discuss why many teachers decide to continue teaching in spite of numerous challenges. In the conclusion the paper proposes steps that need to be taken to keep qualified and motivated teachers in the classroom.

Why become a teacher?

There is much agreement among researchers as regards teachers' motifs for becoming teachers internationally, as well as in Norway. The work of the Australian researchers Helen Watt and Paul Richardson is central in the international research on motivation for teaching, and as such, their work and the elaboration of their work serve as the core of this description of the state of the art. Watt and Richardson (2008) have developed the Factors Influencing Teaching (FIT) choice scale which has been used widely by researchers in many countries to examine why students choose to educate themselves as teachers. A collection of these articles are presented in a special issue of the *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education* (2012, 40(3)), edited by Watt & Richardson and includes papers from Turkey (Kilniç, Watt, & Richardson, 2012), China (Lin, Shi, Wang, Zhang, & Hui, 2012), The Netherlands (Fokkens-Bruisma & Canrinus, 2012), Croatia, (Jugović, Marušić, Ivanec, & Vidović, 2012), Germany (König & Rothland, 2012), and Switzerland (Berger & D'Ascoli, 2012). Common to these studies is that motivation for teaching can be divided into intrinsic, extrinsic, altruistic and, social utility motifs, however, there is also a large extent of overlapping in such a division (Watt & Richardson, 2012). To get a better understanding of motivation for teaching and for the sake of clarification, will, however, each set of motifs be briefly explained.

Intrinsic motivation for teaching indicates a strong subject matter interest, for example in mathematics, and the wish to teach mathematics to others. Extrinsic reasons for becoming a teacher relates more to personal utility, such as a secure job, salary, and vacations, and the fact that vacations

concur with dates when personal children have no kindergarten/school. Altruistic reasons are often formed at an early age by those ‘who have always’ wanted to be a teacher. They see it as a call, and want to help children get a better start in life. Candidates who go into teaching because they view teaching as one of society’s most important vocations, and believe that through teaching they will have an impact on forming the future society, express social utility motifs. Out of the four types, the extrinsic, or personal utility motifs, are found to be weaker than the other three reasons. This is a tendency seen in all the international studies.

When moving from the international context to the Norwegian, we can find a similar pattern. There is not much Norwegian research on motivation for becoming teachers, however, Dag Roness in his doctoral dissertation (2012) examined motivation for studying teacher education among all Norwegian Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) (Praktisk Pedagogisk Utdanning, PPU) students at Norwegian universities which offered the education in 2006. Using his own instrument Roness collected data from the 2006 cohort of students on the first day of teacher education (Roness & Smith, 2009), at the end of the PGCE course (Roness & Smith, 2010), and 18 months after graduation (Roness, 2011). His findings are similar to those of the above international researchers, altruistic motifs seem to have the strongest impact on choosing teaching prior to, as well as the end of, teacher education. Roness and Smith (2010) found a slight shift from altruistic to intrinsic reasons at the end of the one year teacher education program, especially in response to the item ‘I enjoy teaching’. This tendency is also found in Richardson and Watt’s (2010) work which shows that the belief in personal teaching ability was a central motif to enter the teaching profession.

In a much smaller, qualitative study examining narratives based on semi-structured interviews with novice teachers (see method section below), we found that the most frequent response to the question ‘Why did you become a teacher?’ was to work with children and to teach the subject (Smith, Ulvik, & Helleve, 2013). These findings align with findings from the large scale international studies (Watt & Richardson, 2012, the quantitative Norwegian study (Roness & Smith, 2009, 2010), all of which support the claim that the main reasons for choosing teaching as a profession are not extrinsic, but relate to the joy of teaching for the good of children.

An interesting reason for taking the PGCE course in Roness’ work is that about a quarter of the respondents do not know if they want to teach pre and post teacher education, but they find the PGCE a useful education

to have and it looks good on your CV (Rones & Smith, 2010). This is an interesting tendency which will be discussed further in the second section of this paper, 'Why leave teaching?'

Why leave teaching?

Teacher attrition is a huge problem in many countries, however, it is difficult to get the exact numbers of attrition from all age group of teachers. Most research focus on attrition among novice teachers, and Burke, Schuck, Aubussonb, Buchananb, Louvierea, & Prescott (2013) inform about an attrition rate of up to 50% of novice teachers within the first five years in US, and in Australia the figure 45% attrition was released by the Australian Teacher Union in 2006 (reported by Burke et al., 2013). In UK the number of novice teachers leaving the profession is just as worrying, about 40% of novice teachers leave within the first five years (Karsenti & Collin, 2013). In Norway the situation does not seem to be better. Rones (2011) reports that 18 months after graduation from the one year PGCE course cohort of 2006 at Norwegian universities, 45% were not teaching. The reasons why teachers choose to leave the profession before retirement age are many, and some of which documented by research are presented below. But first, some of the terminology used in the research literature will be explained, as attrition is a rather blurred concept in itself.

Macdonald (1999) acknowledges the imprecise understanding of the concept attrition, especially in relation to teachers. He defines attrition from teaching as drop out of the profession and refers to voluntary or premature departure from the teaching profession. Ingersoll (2001) talks about turn-over claiming that it is difficult to present statistics of who has really left teaching, and he prefers to talk about turn-over. He differentiates between healthy turn over, referring to those teachers schools are happy to get rid of, teachers who might do more harm than good working with children. Unhealthy turn-over, according to Ingersoll (2001) relates to good teachers whom the education system would like to keep in the profession, but due to numerous reasons, which will be discussed later, they chose to leave the profession. Luekens, Lyte, Fox, & Chandler (2004) examines attrition based on the concepts 'leavers', 'movers' and 'stayers'. 'Leavers' are those who leave the profession, whereas 'movers' leave one school in favour of another, but they still stay in the profession. 'Stayers' are those who stay in the profession and in the same school. Watt & Richardson (2008) in an extensive study examining motivation for teaching in Australia found three groups, 'highly

engaged persisters’, ‘highly engaged switchers’, and ‘lower engaged desisters’. When looking at definitions by Ingersoll (2001) and Luekens et al. (2004) there are similarities, however, the Australian researchers suggest there is an additional category, ‘the highly engaged switchers’. These are young and highly qualified teachers who enjoy teaching and are doing a good job, yet after a few years of teaching they start looking for new challenges and move on to another job, often in another profession. The Danish researcher, Krejsler (2005) uses the term ‘competence nomad’, or the ‘portfolio teacher’, who takes her/his competence to places where it is needed and which offer new challenges.

The above research indicates that there seems to be a global trend among young people who are well educated and open to challenges, to move from job to job, from profession to profession. The reasons for leaving teaching are not necessarily caused by negative experiences or dissatisfaction, but the urge to move on, to seek new challenges and adventures. This could be part of the explanation why so many young people decide to leave teaching, yet it is not the full explanation.

It would, therefore, be a rather simplistic and naïve conclusion to draw that attrition from teaching is caused by changes in our modern society where opportunities are multiple for highly educated and competent people. There is a solid body of research documenting that there are several other reasons why teachers leave the profession. When a young person decides to become a teacher out of altruistic and intrinsic motifs, the expectations are high, and the reality in school turns out to be quite different from what many novice teachers envisioned. It is often called the practice shock, and the higher the expectations, the bigger the fall (Leenders, DeJong, & Tartwijk, 2003). There are a number of reasons why the reality often is brutal for novice teachers. Novices are often given the most difficult classes, especially when they are hired in a temporary job a week before school starts. Classes other teachers do not want to teach, are left without teachers, and novice teachers desperately seeking for jobs are a quick and legitimate solution. This often leads to the fact that a number of these newly qualified teachers are asked to teach subjects for which they are not qualified, what is also called ‘out of field’ teaching. Teaching out of your own field of expertise requires mountainous planning, and teachers have no choice but focusing on the material to be taught and less on the students and their learning, which was what they believed they would do when choosing to become teachers. It is also reported that many novice teachers feel they lack support from the school leadership, and they are in need of a mentor to support them during the first phase of induction. They are reluctant to talk about

their difficulties with colleagues, as they want to make a good impression, and are afraid to lose the job.

Furthermore, some of the reasons can also be found in inadequate teacher education. Norwegian graduates often complain that teacher education is too theoretical, and there is a huge gap between the theory they are exposed to at the university and the practical reality they face in school. Moreover, new teachers go through a socialization process as they enter a well-established school culture, which might be in conflict to their own envisioned school culture. In a way they go through a form of de-socialization process before engaging in a re-socialization process into the school culture. When this means that the school's practice and values contradict their own fresh and vulnerable teacher identity, they might find themselves in a personal energy stealing conflict (Andrews & Martin, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Sabar, 2004; Ulvik, Smith, & Helleve, 2009; Smith, Ulvik, & Helleve, 2013). The following story told by a novice teacher illustrates many of the above research findings:

I was offered a temporary job this summer, teaching mainly domestic science. However, it was not only domestic science, but also physical education, the worst subject I had in school. I made some crazy plans in both subjects, developed assessment schemes with extensive formative feedback to the students. I felt it was far too much, I couldn't continue like this. I was willing to reduce my position, but I could not continue with this combination of subjects. The few hours of English teaching I had were harmed, as I spent most of my time and energy on learning the subjects I taught, but did not have competence to teach. Another challenge was that I felt I did not have enough time to teach because of all the other things I had to do, such as handing out the fruit portion and do tasks the cleaner or the principal told me to do, and not to forget all the required documentation which has nothing to do with teaching (Smith, Ulvik, & Helleve, 2013, pp. 131-132).

The largest attrition rate is in the beginning phase of teaching, the first five years. There are, however, also well-established teachers who choose to leave the profession before retirement age. When looking at the Norwegian literature on this topic, we find that there is not much, yet the message coming from Norway aligns with international research and points in a few distinct directions. Many teachers feel they are stressed and burned out, mainly due to external and accountability factors (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009, 2011). The classes are too big, and they feel they do not have the time to reach out to the individual student. Too much time is spent on

administration and unnecessary documentation which leaves little time to do what they really want to do, teach their subjects to children (Næss, 2002; Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2011). Another serious complaint is that many teachers do not feel they are trusted as professionals, and they, themselves, do not trust the school leadership to serve the best interest of students and their learning (Elstad, 2013 – unpublished). The increased pressure on documentation and administration inherent in national steering documents is a way of de-professionalising teachers, sending a not very well hidden message of “teachers are not good enough, and ‘we’ (policy makers) have to tell them what to do” (Smith, Engelsen, Haara, Helleve, Olsen, & Ulvik, 2014). Added to this is the fact that teachers feel they are given responsibilities for which they have not been prepared, such as teaching classes with a large number of minority students and students with special needs. This leads to unsatisfactory student achievements, according to which teachers feel they are being assessed (Falch & Rønning, 2005). Relations with students, parents, colleagues and leadership were found to be a central factor in making decisions about staying or leaving the profession (Lillesund, 2012).

Why is attrition an issue?

Why are we so concerned about the attrition rates of teachers? There are two main reasons for this, a pedagogical and an economical. Karsenti and Collin (2013) conclude that when an educational system suffers from a heavy teacher turn-over, it negatively impacts the quality of teaching in schools, especially by making it difficult to build up a cohesive teaching force. Elaborating on this, it can be argued that when a profession lacks member stability, it harms the professionalism of the profession. New members do not stay long enough to develop a professional identity which can be practiced, observed and articulated. The profession becomes subject to directions and restrictions from outside, often by central or local authorities, and the profession’s voice is not heard, as it is not sufficiently developed and clear. Moreover, when looking at the individual school, a too rapid turn-over, meaning many new teachers are employed to replace teachers who decide to leave, a vicious circle is created. New teachers do not have the opportunity to learn from and be supported by experienced teachers, as there are not many left in school. A controlled steady input of new teachers can certainly be a strength to every school. Recently graduated teachers bring in new ideas, knowledge and energy to the school, (Ulvik, Smith, &

Helleve, 2009). The problem is, however, if the school does not have enough established and motivated teachers to receive and support the new ones during the difficult induction phase. The problem is intensified due to the fact that the heaviest turn-over is found in challenging schools with less advantaged students (Karsenti & Collins, 2013). These are the schools that are in most need of a highly qualified and experienced teaching force, but are often staffed with inexperienced teachers. It seems that good teachers want to work in schools in which they are able to teach their subjects, without feeling that being a social worker or care taker steals most of their time.

When looking at the economic aspects of teacher turn over, it is not surprising that most information comes from USA. The Alliance for Excellent Education (2004) estimated that the cost of teacher attrition was about 3 billion US dollars, money which could have been spent on raising the professionalism of teachers and thereby strengthen student learning. The cost of teacher attrition in Norway has, to my knowledge, not yet been publically discussed. However, taking into consideration that teacher education is funded by the government (tax payers) and great sums of money are put into in-service professional learning, the direct costs of attrition in Norway is, I believe, an issue to be discussed and further examined. Moreover, there are probably hidden costs in form of sick pay due to burn-out, early retirement pays etc. that should be added to the total cost. High teacher attrition rates are costly in many ways, and to reduce the figures, more teachers have to be motivated to stay in the profession. We need to learn more about what makes most teachers stay in the profession in spite of the many challenges they face.

Why stay a teacher?

Methods

In the discussion of 'Why stay a teacher?' this paper heavily draws on two recent studies of ours, in addition to seeking support international literature. The methods used in our two studies are briefly presented in the following for clarification purposes.

The first study (Smith, Ulvik, & Helleve, 2013) is a narrative study in which 20 novice teachers were interviewed twice during their first year of teaching. The semi-structured interviews were transcribed and made into narratives by the researchers. The narratives were sent to the respondents,

and their comments were taken into account in revising the narratives. The analysis was conducted first vertically as each narrative was analysed in depth by all three researchers individually before reaching shared conclusions in a moderation meeting. The second analysis was done horizontally in the search for commonalities in the stories. The same process of reaching an agreed analysis was carried out. 12 of the narratives including the analysis are presented in a book 'Førstereisen' by Smith, Ulvik, & Helleve in 2013.

The second study is also a qualitative study conducted within the University College research network of West Norway (UH-nett Vest). The study examined why teachers leave teaching, by using semi-structured interviews of 20 certified teachers from all over the West of Norway who had left the profession. The recorded interview texts were transcribed, and the analysis was first done by the interviewing researcher who then sent the transcriptions and the analysis to the project leader. She worked out a summary of the findings which was commented on by all researchers before the final version was presented.

In our study of narratives of all together 20 novice teachers, we found that the majority do face difficult situations and challenges during their first year of teaching, yet some feel they have been strengthened by them (Smith, Ulvik, & Helleve, 2013). They show what we call resilience, ... *a human capacity to face, overcome, and even be strengthened by experiences of adversity* (Grotberg, 1997). Tait (2008) defines resilience *as a mode of interacting with events in the environment that is activated and nurtured in times of stress* (Tait, 2008, p. 58). In our study many teachers talked about situations of stress, and at times a full year of stress, but the overall picture was that most novices were able to cope with it. When analyzing what resources they used to continue even when their professional life seemed to be difficult, we found that at large these teachers drew upon resources from within the school, from outside work, and not least, within themselves.

From within school they were strengthened by the students and their relationships with the learners. Positive feedback from students and colleagues and experiencing that they successfully reached out to the students, motivated teachers and gave them energy. Relationships in general were found to be a major source for resilience, including supportive relationships with colleagues and with the school leadership. In the second study of teacher attrition, we found that when teachers fail to create relations of trust and respect with students and colleagues, and they feel they are mistrusted by the authorities, they are more likely to leave the profes-

sion as a result of burnout (Smith et al., 2014). Experiencing successful teaching when they felt the students really understood the material or enjoyed class was another source of strength in both studies. Motivation for teaching has been discussed in the beginning of this paper, and sources of resilience, relationships and successful teaching experiences, align with altruistic and intrinsic motivation for teaching, the strongest motifs.

The second category for resilience among novice teachers was found outside school, also much based on relationships with spouses, family, and friends (Smith, Ulvik, & Helleve, 2013). Having somebody to talk to about difficulties at work, without being afraid of jeopardizing their job, helped them through difficult times. Likewise, physical activities, taking care of themselves and doing something totally different from teaching, had a positive impact on their motivation to continue as teachers.

The strongest source of resilience rested within the teachers themselves. The teachers in our study of narratives (Smith, Ulvik, & Helleve, 2013) were all university educated and had a strong disciplinary background. This was found to be a source of strength for them. When teaching their own subject, they felt confident as regards the content of teaching and had time and energy to focus on other problems, such as disciplinary or 'care taking' issues. However, we also found, that when having to teach subjects outside their own field of expertise, they lost the content confidence, and the focus changed from the students to the material. Another interesting finding was that these new teachers talked about the importance of being stubborn, to keep on, not to give up on what they believed was right either it was pedagogical or didactical issues. At the same time, they also talked about the importance of asking for help and advice when they were unsure. Acknowledging the strength in recognizing own weaknesses, empowered them in their work when they were challenged. The combination of being stubborn, not giving up together with being open to external advice, seems to be a strong source of resilience. We also found that teachers who took pride in being teachers, feeling they had chosen an important and meaningful profession, revealed more resilience and aspirations to develop and engage in further professional learning, planning for a future as teachers. These sources of resilience are complemented with a healthy sense of humour, a good laugh at their own mistakes, which seems to help teachers stay motivated and enjoy the profession. The following model illustrates the main sources of resilience we found in our study of novice teachers:

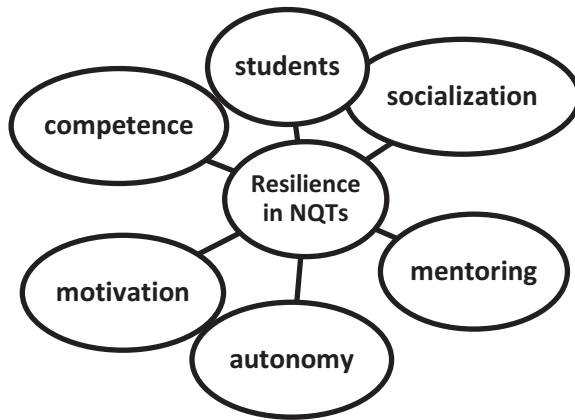


Figure 1. Sources of resilience (Smith, Ulvik, & Helleve, 2013).

When briefly examining the international literature on teacher resilience, we find that to a large extent the findings from our study align with those of international researchers. In a review study by Beltman, Mansfield & Price from 2011, the researchers conclude that altruistic and intrinsic motivation for teaching, a high level of self-efficacy (belief in personal teaching ability) alongside mentor and collegial support, and a strong and caring leadership, empower teachers and keep them in the profession.

International as well as Norwegian research informs about why teachers leave the profession, and we also know quite a lot about what keeps teachers in the profession. Building on this knowledge, it ought to be possible for policy makers and school leaders to take steps to reduce attrition and increase retention of teachers.

What can be done to keep good teachers in the profession?

The first point is to strive at having a solid teacher education which prepares new teachers for the school of today in terms of content knowledge, but also in terms of practical and communicative skills needed in a teaching job. Much of this can only be learned on- the- job as work-based learning. A taste of the praxis of teaching can be provided during teacher education, and the extension of the practicum period in Norwegian

teacher education is targeted to reduce the practice shock. However, as long as the teacher does not hold full responsibility for a class, the reality of teaching is not sufficiently authentic. The solution is to develop an acknowledged and structured induction phase of teaching during which the novices are supported by educated mentors, and both parties, the novice and the mentor are given earmarked time for meetings, reflections and for developing a professional portfolio which will serve as the basis for licensing upon completing the induction. Likewise, in-service professional learning should be an inherent part of the job for all teachers, and research informs that the most useful professional learning is work-based learning within communities of practice (Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Fung, 2007). To maintain motivation and enthusiasm among teachers throughout a long career, the Irish model of looking at teacher education as a career long education with three distinct phases, initial, induction, and in-service, seems to be a positive direction to go, yet its success still needs to be supported by research (The Teaching Council, 2011).

Another document worthwhile looking at in the effort to keep good and motivated teachers in the profession, is the McKinsey report from 2012 informing about how the best educational systems in the world keep on getting better (Mourshed, Chijioke, & Barber, 2012). The main points these systems have initiated can be summarized as follows:

They move from strict control, scripted teaching, and macro governance, **to**

- local and personal autonomy, including opening up for teacher autonomy,
- internal accountability instead of external accountability characterized by a testing regime,
- collaborative practice, work-based learning, sharing experiences,
- uphold a clear career structure with explicit phases demanding recertification to continue teaching,
- empower teachers through self-chosen compulsory professional learning activities, and not top-down decided initiatives,
- remove administrative responsibilities from teacher to administrative and other support staff in school,
- provide mentoring during induction and in preparation for the various career phases,
- apply strict entrance requirement to teacher education, select the best candidates, and offer competitive salaries.

When looking at the above points, they strongly resonate with what has been discussed above in relation to motivation for teaching, what makes teachers leave the profession and moreover, what makes teachers stay in the profession, the sources of resilience which makes them continue working in a demanding and challenging job day after day, year after year. It appears that we know much about how to reduce attrition of good teachers, yet we do not succeed to do so. Attrition is an increasing problem, and the figures are alarming. It has been estimated that in the not very far future, 2020, Norway will lack 11.000 qualified teachers, and 50 288 (29%) of qualified teachers work outside the education sector (Roksvaag & Texmon, 2012). If the ultimate aim is to improve student learning and achievements, it is high time for policy makers to change focus from increasing external control and accountability to investing in teachers and their professionalism. We cannot expect, and it is certainly not recommended for the individual teacher or for the teaching profession, that once a teacher, means always a teacher. However, the current situation in Norway and many other countries is that too many teachers who once were teachers, are not teachers anymore. We need to act now to secure a constant improvement of our educational system, and, as I see it, the future of our society.

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