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**INDIVIDUAL PAPER:**

***TELLING TALES:  
STORIES FROM NEW TEACHERS IN  
NSW COUNTRY SCHOOLS***

**Cheryl Williams**

**University of Newcastle/NSW Department of Education and  
Training**

**Australia**

## **Abstract**

The focus on recruitment and retraining schemes can often overshadow the issue of retention of teachers in schools (Adams, 2001). Merrow (1999) noted, "the teaching pool keeps losing water because no one is paying attention to the leak. That is we're misdiagnosing the problem as 'recruitment' when it's really 'retention'". Research findings from studies of new teachers undertaken by the Project on the Next Generation of Teachers (PNGT) at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and by the NSW Department of Education's Training and Development Directorate (Carter 2000), support Merrow's observation. A recognition of the changing nature of teachers' career plans, the need for professional development strategies such as systematic school-based induction and the implementation of effective supervision and mentoring programs (Ramsey 2000, Ingersoll 2000, Carter 2000), could assist schools in retaining their newly appointed teachers, particularly in country/rural areas.

A research study aimed at understanding and interpreting the imagined, real and reflective experiences of new teachers in their first year of appointment in country schools may assist policy-makers, teacher educators and schools in perceiving new ways of both recruiting and retaining newly appointed teachers, through a professional support strategy of new teacher learning. In my dual roles as a doctoral research student and Academic Associate for a school district in country NSW, I intend to undertake this project to examine the lives and experiences of newly appointed teachers in country schools. The 'tales they tell' explores the notion that the school site is 'where teachers must find success and satisfaction. It is there they will decide whether or not to continue to teach' (PNGT 2001). This paper discusses the background to the study and proposals for its scope and impact on the retention of newly appointed teachers in country NSW schools.

## **Caveat**

This paper has served an important purpose- it has been a process undertaken to find the way into my doctoral journey. A colleague said to me once 'there's nothing like a damn good story' and whilst the rules of academic writing may dictate that structure and substance have a role to play, I strongly believe that dreams and desires play an equal part in the academic process. In many ways, the dreams and desires of our newly appointed teachers conflict with an often harsh and unrelenting reality of teaching, where struggling to survive becomes a daily experience. Idealism gives way to pragmatism; so many new teachers despair of success and are lost to education forever. Their great journey through life to become a teacher leads unto an often rocky path, as they experience their first days and weeks in their new schools. What they imagined it to be is far from the reality that it is. On this rocky path they may be offered guidance and assistance, from bureaucrats and supervisors or wise and trusted counsellors. Their peers and colleagues encourage reflection, to see the journey of experience for what it was- and to move on. Many of our new teachers experience great joy and find rewards on their travels. In listening to the stories they share with us, we may develop a new understanding of how to encourage and assist them on their journeys. How they find their way, from becoming to being a teacher, are their telling tales.

## **The story so far**

Since the late 1960's academics, schools and education systems have pondered, researched and reported the phenomenon of newly appointed teachers exiting from the profession in their first years (Eddy 1969, Lortie 1975, Zeichner 1981, Veenman 1984, Martinez 1994). Similar conclusions have been drawn from research findings to explain just why it is that up to forty per cent of teacher education graduates leave their schools in the first three years of appointment to US and NSW schools (Ingersoll, 2000, McCormack and

Thomas 2001 Manuel 2002). Low salaries, challenging student behaviours, personal and geographical isolation, a lack of administrative and professional support and an idealistic view of teaching have been discussed as reasons for new teacher attrition (see Ingersoll, 2000 Carter, 2001 Ramsey, 2000 Leete, 2001 for example).

Various strategies have been developed and implemented to encourage and support new teachers in their first years. Globally, orientation and induction programs, mentoring, collegial networks and online communication have been instigated in various countries and states (for example New York's *New Teacher Project* and the *Novice Support Teacher Project* at the University of Illinois: Urbana-Champaign, the *NQT Induction* mandate in UK schools). Many new teachers 'survive' their initial experiences and go on to grow and prosper personally and professionally. What should be of great concern in the research findings from these projects and others is that not only do many teachers still leave even though supported and encouraged in their first years, it is often the brightest and best who choose to separate from the profession (Ingersoll 2000).

Locally, the NSW Department of Education (hereon referred to as *DET*) has attempted to 'stem the tide' of newly appointed teachers from leaving schools by developing a diverse yet systematic approach to new teacher professional learning. An innovative relationship with ten universities to provide a *Certificate in Mentoring: Beginning Teacher Development* is described by Kay Martinez (2002) as 'the most comprehensive systemic initiative in Australia to match practice to rhetoric around the mentoring of newly appointed teachers' (p6). The DET also provides schools with a comprehensive *Induction of Teachers* kit, district funding for newly appointed teacher programs and is trialling two Academic Associate: Teacher Education positions to support new teachers in schools and at universities.

Although acknowledging the importance and value of this organised and systematic program, Kaye Thomas and Ann McCormack (2002) have commented that 'the NSW DET as the system employer, has developed excellent general resources materials, however, their use rather than being suggested, needs to be organized to reach every NQT [sic] through mandatory training for principals, mentors and supervisors' (p10). This recommendation could be realized in the next year, as the DET implements the *Teacher Mentor Pilot Project*, an initiative whereby fifty qualified and purpose trained professional support teachers operate in schools with high populations of newly appointed teachers.

The DET has also recently implemented a teacher recruitment initiative, *teach.NSW*, which aims to encourage quality HSC graduates, university students and mature age entrants from diverse fields of employment to view teaching as an important and viable career. This recruitment program is a response to not only replace the great number of experienced teachers who will exit NSW schools in the near future but to also replace those who will leave in their first years of appointment following graduation from their teacher education courses for the reasons mentioned previously. So whilst many commentators would argue that recruitment is often the focus in relation to retention, I would concur with Kay Martinez that NSW DET is moving towards a more equitable position on both issues.

### **The teaching landscape**

The NSW Department of Education and Training employs more than 65,000 teachers who should be well positioned to provide newly appointed teachers with a high level of support and professional development. At an average age of 43 (Ramsey 2000), the teaching service has much to share with the new generation of teachers who are making their way into public education. These experienced educators also act as colleagues, mentors and

supervisors to the many preservice teachers from teacher education institutions that undertake the professional experience components of their training in NSW state schools. It is crucial to point out however, that this wealth of experience and knowledge may be lost to us in NSW as it could be in Northern America, through the 'revolving door' of teacher attrition and turnover (Ingersoll, 2001) as well as to high rates of resignation and retirement.

An analysis of North American research reveals similar characteristics with NSW in terms of teacher supply, turnover and maintenance. Whilst North American authorities are looking at a target of 2.2 million teachers (Ingersoll 2001, Johnson 2001) to meet demands over the next ten years, Ramsey (2001) suggests that we may be looking at the supply of 54,000 teachers to replace those who will leave the NSW state school system over the same period (p190). Recent figures may indicate that teacher education course applications are growing, but fewer teachers are training than in previous years, so it is important that we maintain those who enter the teaching service. However these writers also remind us that those who now constitute part of the teaching service have a very different set of reasons in general for becoming teachers than their predecessors. They find their way to teaching through different entry pathways, are quite aware that they could earn more money in other occupations and are prepared to move on if their administration or principal does not support their efforts to become effective teachers (Ingersoll 2001, Johnson et al 2001a, 2001b).

### **Teacher shortages**

Reports in the media have pointed to an impending teacher shortage in NSW state schools, for instance "the NSW government has admitted it needed between 2500 and 3000 new teachers each year to replace those leaving the classroom" (Sun Herald, 22/9/2002). As the current cohort of experienced teachers begins to retire a new generation of teachers is entering schools. Unlike the current teaching service, many newly appointed teachers do not see teaching as a lifelong occupation and expect to change jobs during their working life. Teaching qualifications give the holder undeniable entry into many occupations such as retail, human resources and other fields of public service. As Ramsey (2000) observed:

teacher education graduates and many young teachers have skills, including higher order personal skills so critical in the profession, which are valued in the wider labour market. Teachers who contacted the Review believed their background as teachers strengthened their communication skills and their ability to deal with people (p40).

Unlike their predecessors newly appointed teachers are often unwilling to travel to areas outside of where they currently reside, let alone rural or isolated schools many hours from family, friends and a social life. Sometimes this unwillingness extends to those who are appointed to schools with reputations as 'tough' or 'difficult'. Those who do accept appointments often find the going very hard and choose to end their first appointment soon after it begins or before they receive a transfer to a more favourable school or area. The fact that the staffing operation does not take into consideration factors such as current geographic, personal or cultural positions in their efforts to place newly appointed teachers does not auger well for the future of the profession. Newly appointed teachers are often the last to be appointed to NSW state schools, following the transfer of experienced teachers. Often those placed through the Graduate Recruitment program can find themselves in isolated or difficult schools.

Ramsey noted that waiting lists did not necessarily select the best teacher available at the time for a vacant position, being reflective only of how long a person had been 'waiting' for

appointment. Ramsey goes as far as to recommend that the DET 'abolish the waiting lists of people wishing to be employed' and implement a policy that selects the best available applicant for the vacancy (p202). This would require not only a recognition of the changing landscape of teaching and the teaching service but also the renegotiation of the state wide staffing agreement with the NSW Teachers Federation.

### **New Teacher Attrition**

The phenomenon of newly appointed teachers exiting the profession soon after their arrival is certainly not specific to NSW state schools. In an extensive study of teacher attrition and turnover in North American schools, Richard Ingersoll (2001) analyses reasons for separation from the teaching service: 'lack of administrative support especially for new employees' (p9) is given by participants as one explanation for resignation. This reason, revealed by another North American report, was also referred to in an article by Jennifer Leete (2001) in the NSW Teachers Federation journal Education 'teachers who do not feel they are supported by administrators were often more likely to quit' (p.2). Ingersoll also notes that

the age of the teacher is the most salient predictor of the likelihood of their turnover: the relative odds of younger teachers departing are 184% higher than for middle-aged teachers (p17).

This observation is relative to past NSW statistics that indicated one in six teachers exited the profession in the first two years of employment (Cross 1991 in Martinez 1994). Moreover, Leete refers to a more recent and alarming set of statistics:

in the year 2000 the highest number of resignations were from (DET) teachers aged 25-29 years. While teachers in this age group make up a very small percentage of the current teaching service, the actual number resigning is far higher than for any other age group (p2).

Ann Williams and Stephanie Prestage (2000) refer to the UK experiencing high number of teachers leaving the profession in the first five years, citing lack of support for newly qualified teachers as a possible reason. It would follow then that the retention of teachers new to the profession is an issue of as much concern to education authorities as the recruitment of potential teachers into the profession.

### **The 'reality' of teaching**

Newly appointed teachers come to their first appointments as qualified teachers replete with a repertoire of pedagogical skills learnt during coursework and professional experience in schools. But it is only with the assumption of responsibility for 'their own class(es)' that the reality of 'being a teacher', rather than a teacher education student or student teacher, sets in. Mon Khamis (2000) notes that,

the experience of a beginning teacher has been described as a 'sink or swim' situation in which little assistance is provided. The novice is expected from the first day to instruct students and perform the tasks as a veteran teacher. Although the expectations of their performances may not be the same as expectations of the veteran teachers, the responsibilities are identical (p1).

Implicit with the development of any approach to teaching comes a new and often daunting set of responsibilities. The newly appointed teacher is now singly responsible and accountable for the planning and delivery of effective learning programs developed from prescribed syllabus, effective management of student behaviour and assessment and reporting of student learning outcomes. In many instances, newly appointed teachers are expected to be capable and efficient in these practices, with little guidance or training in how it is supposed to happen. Page, Marlow and Malloy (2000) report from one of their research participants the 'expectations from principals and teachers that the novice to be expert and competent from day one' (p229). Ramsey (2000) reported that 'no other profession expects so much from their new practitioners in their early years on the job' and it has been widely reported and written that many principals expect their newly appointed teachers to be expert and competent in their first year of teaching.

This can induce teacher stress and lead to a lack of confidence in new teachers. Anecdotal reports from both preservice and newly appointed teachers tell of being advised by their experienced colleagues and principals to 'forget everything you learnt at the university- this is the real world' only to be later told 'you should know about this - you've been to university haven't you?' These statements serve not only to devalue the learning experience of the new teacher: they add to feelings of isolation and loneliness described by newly appointed teachers in their first weeks of appointment. Sometimes treated in a patronizing manner as somehow deficient and lacking in teaching skills, new teachers are often left to discover just how things work in their new school, with no recognition of their 'professional capital', that is, what they bring to teaching.

Whilst most first year teachers are 'new' to the schools they find themselves appointed to, they have spent countless hours as students, participants and observers in a variety of school situations and settings, in what Lortie (1975) refers to as 'an apprenticeship of observation'. During field experiences, practicums and internships they have gained invaluable teaching and learning experiences that may inform the first weeks and months of professional practice in their own classrooms. Ways of managing student behaviour and responding to student learning difficulties are also learned in these preservice experiences. When combined with advice and guidance specific to their new school culture and context, newly appointed teachers may construct a 'pedagogy tool kit' with which to develop and manage their own repertoire of teaching skills. Through collaboration and collegial dialogue with both experienced colleagues and their peers, newly appointed teachers gain the important and valued professional, pedagogical and personal support needed to make their transition from teacher education to teaching much more likely to be successful.

### **The case for professional support**

Imagine this situation.

A newly qualified doctor reports to the chief of staff on the first day of her residency in surgery. The chief immediately says to her, 'I'm so glad you are here because we have a patient who has been waiting a long time for open-heart surgery. None of the other doctors want to perform it because he is such a high insurance risk. So, I'd like you to perform this operation yourself. I realise you are just out of medical school and you don't have any surgical tools or equipment, but I purchased this brand-new Boy Scout knife for you. You see, all of the scalpels are being used by the more experienced surgeons who, by the way, also have reserved all the operating theatres and all of the available anaesthesiologists. But don't worry we have a nice clean

table in the waiting room where you can perform your operation. And we have lots of aspirin to give your patient after surgery to help relieve his pain.'  
(Rogers and Babinski, 2002, p90)

Rogers and Babinski proceed to state that while this example may seem a little extreme 'it is not much different to what we often do to many of our first year teachers in schools'. Jackie Manuel (2002) describes similar situations in her paper '*Such are the ambitions of youth*', when discussing the experiences of Debbie and Jasmine, two first year teachers who experience high levels of professional, personal and pedagogical stress in their initial year of teaching. The stories told by new teachers are essential to understanding what happens to them to cause them to leave. Page, Marlowe and Malloy (2000) use 'teachers' words' from the letters they collected from new teachers when discussing their professional needs, because 'they are so much more eloquent and meaningful than our words could be (p229). In concluding that universities and school districts need to improve approaches to new teachers' needs, Page, Marlowe and Malloy recommend that they 'have to work together to create systems and cultures that address these needs' (p30).

In terms of the provision of support for newly appointed teachers it would seem a natural process for them to be consulted and involved in the development and formation of professional learning programs. In listening to their voices we may gain insight into their real needs, to discover what they truly feel and believe will assist them on their professional journey. When discussing a project on teacher professional learning, Jane Hunter and Sue Beveridge (2002) refer to the work of Gratch (2000) when stating that 'the voices of teachers' who cross boundaries and challenge structure and who then become sources for identifying these skills which must be practised and developed to promote the practices of collegiality, autonomy, expertise and judgement' (p3). Similarly, in the stories told by Debbie and Jasmine in '*Such are the ambitions of youth*', we gain an 'insider' view to the world of the newly appointed teacher and it is indeed their voices which tell how their experience informs their professional judgement. Debbie and Jasmine identify and discuss processes that may have assisted their entry into the teaching world, stating that a lack of collegiality and induction practice impeded their transition into the profession.

### **New teachers' voices**

Manuel reports that Debbie and Jasmine were considered outstanding graduates from their teacher education courses: Debbie, 'a Distinction student with high career aspirations', Jasmine, 'a mature age Honours student' (p9). Both teachers characterised the year as one in which they experienced:

.. little collegial support, high demands of senior administrative roles, no formal induction, disillusionment with the system and teaching in general (p10).

Whilst both teachers reiterated a commitment to their students, the perceived lack of support from the system and their experienced colleagues lead both teachers to question their commitment to being educators. Ultimately 'four years on from that first year out, Jasmine has left the public school system and Debbie continues to teach in the same school, having taken maternity leave twice' (p 11). Manuel concludes this paper by recommending that the reasons why teachers leave be urgently addressed, through 'a range of systematic support structures and policies being implemented for all beginning teachers in NSW' (p16). Responsibility without support in the first years of teaching then can lead to teacher stress and attrition, as evidenced by the alarming separation rates previously discussed.

## Support for the Newly Appointed Teacher

Zeichner and Gore (1990) state that 'policies, traditions, power and personalities work to construct a school culture that provides further challenges to the beginning teacher'. In many instances these factors can 'make or break' a beginning teacher. This crucial element, the construction of a school culture and its effect on the new teacher, is being investigated in depth by Johnson et al (2001a) in The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers (from hereon referred to as PNGT) at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Their research suggests that,

the key to addressing teacher shortages lies not in recruitment policies but in support and training at the school site. For it is in schools and classrooms where teachers must find success and satisfaction. It is there they will decide whether or not to continue to teach (p1).

This concurs with Merrow's (1999) observation, 'the teaching pool keeps losing water because no one is paying attention to the leak. That is, we're misdiagnosing the problem as 'recruitment' when it is really 'retention'". Adams (2001) has also pointed out this significant factor when stating that 'the focus on recruitment often overshadows the issue of retention of teachers in schools'. While there is a significant focus on support of new teachers in many schools, the PNGT findings revealed that it is in the daily struggle to 'survive' that new teachers face their greatest challenges. The PNGT reported that new teachers struggled to put together their daily teaching plans with no long-term guidance or planning. While mentors had been provided by the school district, there was little or no time for meetings or discussion. There were very few visits by colleagues and administrators to the new teachers class or staff rooms and limited opportunities to observe or team-teach with experienced colleagues. The schools were not at all organized to help the new teachers cope with the demands of the curriculum or student management issues. In short 'neither the cultures nor the organisational structures of the schools were geared towards their need as novice teachers' (p2).

In another paper 'Counting on Colleagues: New Teachers' Experiences of Professional Culture' (Kardos et al 2001), the PNGT extends on the theme of professional support for new teachers in schools. When finding their way in their new schools, new teachers determine that 'it is the professional culture that will provide formal and informal information about how to teach and how to be successful in that school' (p1). A new teacher joins an educational culture that has defined norms and ways of doing things, shared memories and understandings. If the new teacher can 'attach' to, or be mentored by, an understanding and patient experienced teacher, the feeling of being isolated and alone can be minimized. Leete (2001) refers to a strategy in Washington State which has involved many school districts using fulltime 'veteran' teachers to do nothing but train teachers. Each experienced teacher is paid to help about twenty new teachers develop curriculum teaching methods and classroom management techniques (2001 p2). In other projects experienced colleagues in schools assist new teachers in understanding the culture and context of each school, assisting them to adjust and settle into their workplace.

In their research, Kardos et al sought to discover what kinds of professional cultures new teachers found in their schools, what were their initial and ongoing experiences and what role did the professional cultures play in the new teachers' successes in instruction, contributions to the school and attitudes towards their career in teaching. Theirs was 'a small and purposeful sample of first and second year teachers. However the respondents' accounts and appraisals are nonetheless provocative and informative. They can assist policy makers and practitioners in their current efforts to prepare for effective induction of a new generation of teachers' (p3). I would argue that this 'mapping' of the professional culture

of schools is an important strategy in developing an understanding of the teaching landscape in NSW schools. It may be prudent to develop a deeper understanding of the socialized or enculturated situations newly appointed teachers enter when they are allocated to their first schools. When developing plans to provide support by way of induction and mentoring programs, it would be wise to consider the particular culture of a school, as the PGNT study concludes this can have an effect on the usefulness and efficiency of the programs.

Continuing the theme that an analysis of the professional culture of a school can reveal whether it may be supportive of newly appointed teachers, a previous report undertaken by the Training and Development Directorate (Carter, 1997) discusses the success of induction and mentoring programs in a sample of four NSW state schools. Carter reported that of the nineteen beginning teachers in the four case study schools, those few who were contemplating a change were those who faced significant challenges in their work and whole school responsibilities, without the sustained support of a mentor or supervisor' (p20). Reflective of the PNGT research, Carter states that:

..cultures of professional collegiality and collaborative endeavour underpinned effective induction and mentoring practices in the case study schools .. in their most effective form induction programs and mentoring strategies were an outgrowth of these cultures of collegiality rather than self-contained programs existing separate from other programs in the school (p21).

While any attempt to provide support to newly appointed teachers must be seen as a positive outcome in assisting in retention, Martinez (2002) argues that 'the mentoring of novices by experienced teachers has a contradictory potential as a system of positive, assisted professional entry and renewal, and as a critical, occupational perpetuation of existing practices and patterns of inequitable outcomes for children' (p2). I concur with Martinez in this observation, in that we have to question whether we are encouraging newly appointed teachers to develop and 'grow' as a 'teacher self' or if we are simply encouraging the maintenance of the current pedagogical *status quo*, regarding what is currently viewed as 'a good teacher' and reproducing that figure through current induction and mentoring practices.

Khamis (2000) describes 'the anguish of compromise', where the newly appointed teacher finds themselves in conflict with the prevailing administrative, professional and social culture of the school they are appointed to (p6). Energetic, enthusiastic, full of idealism and what 'could be', the newly appointed teacher is embroiled in a culture of conflict, often faced with a lack of support, time or resources to implement their potentially effective practice.

Consequently beginning teachers must learn to adapt their teaching to 'fit in', and compromise their level of expectation of themselves and their pupils in order to reduce the discrepancy between what is 'ideal' and what is 'realistic' in various circumstances (Khamis, 2000,p7).

I would comment here that Khamis' assertions would support my fundamental claim that newly appointed teachers bring with them a potential to effect improvement and reform in schools, but are inhibited from doing so because of the 'regimes of truth' perpetuated by traditional school cultures. Furthermore, Page, Marlowe and Malloy state, 'in an age of major education reform, it is imperative that teacher preparation programs work collaboratively with schools districts to define learning and learning agendas'(2000: p229).

## Induction of Newly Appointed Teachers

The NSW Ministerial Review of Teacher Education, *Quality Matters* (Ramsey 2000) identified teacher induction as 'the critical link between preparation and practice as a professional. Evidence to the review indicates that the link is not as strong as it could be' (p 205). The evidence highlighted the lack of defined responsibility for induction with little clarity to the respective roles and responsibilities of all parties involved in the preparation and professional growth of teachers. It is interesting and perhaps relevant to point out that concerns about newly appointed teacher induction were raised in previous reviews of Teacher Education referred to in *Quality Matters*. Ramsey noted that in over two decades more than twenty reviews of teacher education had been carried out and that:

No other profession in the nation has been the subject of so much enquiry, nor had so many recommendations made about it in terms of the preparation and education of its members as has teaching, yet made so little progress (p28).

Auchmuty (1980) raised concerns about induction stating that 'beginning teachers should not be placed in schools or assigned to teach classes for which they are not prepared'. The matter of being placed in unsuitable schools or having to teach outside their qualified subject area was also revealed and discussed in Ingersoll's study on teacher attrition (2001). In the review, Ramsey referred to Correy's 1980 report *Teachers for Tomorrow* that suggested:

..that there be at least 10 per cent reduction in the teaching load of teachers in their first year and a time reduction for teachers involved in supervision dependent upon the extent of their supervisory responsibilities (p30).

Ramsey also points out that Speedy made yet another observation a decade later of the same nature as Correy, 'that schools and school systems review induction procedures with a view to increasing support to new teachers and reducing first year teaching loads' (p30). Although Ramsey commented on the high quality of induction and support programs in some NSW schools, it is also true that in some schools professional support for beginning teachers is intermittent, disorganized or even nonexistent.

Observations were made in advice about the sometimes poor quality of induction programs in which new teachers received inadequate support by way of supervision and mentoring. Cases were cited of teachers in their first appointment being escorted to their classrooms and largely left to make their own way, without guidance encouragement, counseling or active supervision (p64).

McCormack and Thomas (2000) referred to this absence in their recent study of induction and support for first year physical education teachers 'the evidence highlighted the defined lack of responsibility for induction with little clarity to the respective roles of all parties involved in the preparation and professional growth of teachers' (p1).

## Professional Support in Schools

The context and culture of the individual school can greatly affect whether the beginning teacher simply 'survives' their first year of teaching through 'trial and error' or 'sink or swim' techniques or becomes a professional learner in a professional development environment. Schools with well organized and planned induction programs operating in a culture of supervision and mentoring by experienced educators, inspired by an involved and enlightened principal, can make a difference to the effectiveness and maintenance of

beginning teachers. In some schools the principal is seen as an administrative figurehead, concerned with facts, figures and the management of the school, appearing in the corridors or playground only to deal with meetings, complaints or difficult students. In others the principal is actively involved in daily routine, talking to teachers and students, often visiting or teaching a class as a method of developing a connection with the learning process.

Newly appointed teachers often see the involvement of the principal in induction and mentoring programs as a measurement of the school's commitment to the professional learning culture of the school. Johnson et al (2001b) state that

The success of school-based induction programs hinges on how teachers work together, and the principal can play a central role in establishing faculty norms and facilitating interaction between and among teachers with various levels of experience' (p3).

Khamis (2000) referred to the *Review of Australian Teacher Induction* (NSW DSE, 1992) that provided a comparison of the views of newly appointed teachers and their principals.

The discrepancy between the two groups reveals that principals perceived beginning teachers as lacking in confidence and thus unwilling to approach others for assistance. However, the beginning teachers appear willing to do so, but time constraints and lack of support from experienced teachers does not facilitate this process. Principals reported there was devaluing of beginning teachers' opinions by more experienced staff .. seen as a 'threat' due to their recent qualifications, 'new' ideas and overall length of time taken to prepare them for teaching (p9).

The reluctance of newly appointed teachers to share their efficacy concerns with principals was highlighted by Page, Marlowe and Malloy's research, 'I would never ask my principal anything that suggests I feel less than competent' (p 231). That a new teacher would feel unable to approach the foremost educational leader in their school to gain advice is often reported and of grave consequence. The aforementioned Massachusetts study on beginning teachers provided a great deal of information on the role of the principal, and important patterns about what the principal said, and did, concerning induction and support of new teachers. (p17)

The provision of professional support in schools then, can be a determining factor as to whether the beginning teacher succeeds or fails in their first year of teaching. Schools that provide a systematic and planned induction program, combined with effective supervision and mentoring, offer a supportive professional learning culture for the newly appointed teacher. Amongst a proliferation of successful North American induction and mentoring programs, ongoing research such as is being undertaken by the *Project for the Next Generation of Teachers* at Harvard Graduate School and the *Novice Teacher Support Project* at the University of Illinois: Urbana-Champaign are examples of successful projects that investigate and report on beginning teachers' first years in schools. These projects seek to develop better support systems for first and second year students through a transitional process that might seamlessly connect pre-service preparation, the initial years of teaching and professional certification programs. Features include the pairing of novice teachers in a school or district, the processes of a cohort model and linkages between district and university work (Page, Marlowe and Malloy 2000 p232).

Carter (1997) reported that the issues uncovered in North American research were similar to those discussed with beginning teachers in Australian schools. New teachers express a need for strong support from principals and administrators in their professional learning specific to the culture and context of their school, mentoring from 'a wise and trusted counsellor', the development of collegial networks and the maintenance of a balance in their daily lives (Page, Marlow and Malloy, 2000, p229). Rather than stumbling from one classroom crisis to the next, new teachers need to have an organized and systematic approach to professional development and planning for teaching which prevents them having to spend inordinately long hours after school and at night just surviving their first term at school.

### **'Should I stay or should I go?'**

I am young. I am new. I am too big for my britches. I am unaware of all the thousands of reasons that we can't do this or that .... there is one of me with my enthusiasm and my beliefs. (First year teacher- Page, Marlow and Malloy, 2000, p229)

This quote from a first year teacher in North America was that which drew my complete attention and encapsulated the situation presented by new teachers in the literature reviews, discussions and meetings I have undertaken as a teacher educator, mentor and professional support consultant in schools. That so many enthusiastic, energetic and potentially great teachers are lost in their first years seemed to be not only an inefficient and unprofessional situation but incredibly personally disappointing- the lost dreams and desires of a new generation, discarded and forgotten having barely begun.

What happens to a newly appointed teacher in their first year as a professional educator? What experiences influence whether they will remain to become a knowledgeable, practiced educator or leave to join the ranks of the disenchanting through resignation or career change? Are formal and informal support mechanisms such as induction and mentoring programs indeed useful to newly appointed teachers? What role should the principal, as the educational leader in a school, play in the professional 'evolution' of a newly appointed teacher? What professional responsibilities should experienced staff have to the newly appointed teacher? How can supportive, effective supervision and professional development be encouraged as a professional growth strategy? Indeed, what role can the newly appointed teacher play in programs to encourage them to stay in schools?

These questions (and many others) plague those making attempts to develop support programs and strategies to assist in the retention of newly appointed teachers. Research findings from the many projects and studies on newly appointed teachers reviewed for this paper indicate that even the 'best' support strategies sometimes do not prevent attrition. We know what it takes to support, challenge and professionally grow our new teachers. Quality supervision, accredited mentors, systematic school based induction programs and collegial networks assist teachers in their first year of appointment by providing invaluable personal, professional and pedagogical support. However, higher levels of support from principals, administrators and systems by committing time, finances and personnel to newly appointed teacher strategies could assist in 'stemming the flow' of recent graduates from our schools.

In ensuring the retention and professional growth of our new teachers, we maximise the possibility of achieving the best possible learning outcomes for students in our classrooms.

### **Speaking from experience**

When I trained as a teacher in the late seventies, teaching was very much seen as a 'calling' or a vocation. I felt (and still feel) proud and privileged to be a teacher. Having gained entrance and been enculturated, it was as a traditional marriage- a partnership for life. Of course some of our new teachers will take on the role of 'teacher for life' but current research and experience indicates that this will be in diminished numbers compared to patterns of the past. Administrators and bureaucrats will need to take into consideration these changes when determining plans and strategies for the future generation of teachers when developing policies for recruitment and employment. The 'sink or swim' version of new teacher orientation and induction does not assist in the retention of newly appointed teachers, as evidenced by the previous discussion of retention and attrition issues for newly appointed teachers.

My desire to undertake this study and to interpret and 'tell the tales' of newly appointed year out teachers, comes from my both my personal and professional need to understand how we can best support, assist, encourage and challenge them to become quality teachers. In my years as a teacher and as a supervisor or colleague teacher of practicum and internship students, I have determined that it is now more difficult than ever for them to survive their first years of teaching. Not only because of changes to curriculum, assessment, pedagogy, resources and the technical nature of teaching but also because of what I have seen as momentous change in teacher culture, teachers' work and indeed, teachers' lives. Massive societal changes and shifts in culture have also affected the everyday life of a school and the lives of students who attend.

This study has emerged from three pedagogical, personal and professional standpoints: a fundamental and passionate belief that new teachers hold some kind of pedagogical key to the puzzle of reforming and improving schools, a personal commitment to making a difference in the lives of new teachers and professional despair watching new teachers leave their chosen profession during their first years on schools. That we can sometimes abandon and leave our new teachers to 'sink or swim' is a foreboding and educationally dangerous situation for the next generation of students they were to teach.

### **The way forward**

As discussed previously, professional support is provided to many newly appointed teachers through orientation and induction programs, mentoring and collegial groups. However I would argue that in many cases the *principles, practices and substance* of support programs and strategies offered might not be suitable to particular or individual newly appointed teachers. In much the same way that Jenny Gore (2002) has suggested that we 'reassemble' approaches to teacher education, I would put forward the notion that we 'unpack and reassemble' approaches to support for newly appointed teachers. I am particularly interested in Martinez's assertion that new teachers bring a fresh, enthusiastic and invigorated approach to teaching, which is often ignored and treated as deficient by principals and experienced colleagues (1994, 2002). Recognition and placing value on the experience of new teachers was also discussed in research findings by the Project for the Next Generation of Teachers, which found that new teachers reported:

they were best served in schools with an 'integrated professional culture .. were provided with sustained support and ongoing exchange across

experience levels for all teachers: there were no separate camps of veteran and novice teachers [*sic*] (Kardos *et al* 2001 p4)

The development of a teacher identity and the process of 'becoming a teacher' are often discarded at the school gate when the newly appointed teacher arrives to take up their first 'real' teaching position. Principals and experienced colleagues may dismiss what the newly appointed teacher has experienced on their journey to 'being', thereby negating and devaluing exactly what the process was that guided the new teacher to their destination. How the newly appointed teacher is perceived within the culture of the new school is crucial to their 'being a teacher'.

### **The new teacher as 'the Other'**

In her landmark book, 'The Second Sex' Simone de Beauvoir described the phenomenon of women being constructed and treated as 'the Other'. Separate and different from men, somehow *lacking*, women languished as less than equal in society. And so it seems similar for the new teacher. Separate and different from their knowledgeable colleagues on the basis of their *lack* of experience, new teachers are constructed as 'the Other' in the teaching profession. According to de Beauvoir's thesis, from the beginning man named himself the Self and woman the Other (Mitchell in Tong p201). Similarly in the teaching world then, perhaps the experienced teacher names themselves as the Self and the inexperienced new teacher as the Other? Experience has become a form of power and it is sometimes wielded to explain and maintain the superiority of the Self. This perceived lack of experience is often used to oppress and still the creation of an individual new teacher 'Self'.

The perceived inexperience of new teachers by bureaucrats, principals, colleagues and parents should be of great concern to the education community. That the new teacher should invest many years in developing and becoming a teacher, only to be dismissed in their first days of appointment in their new school as not knowing, belies the experience of the new teacher. Deborah Britzman (1991) reminds us that 'the development of the teacher's identity always involves competing chronologies of becoming' (p55).

Each sense of place and time presents different sets of demands and assumptions and makes available a different range of voices and discursive practices. Students who enter teacher education bring with them their first chronology .. their classroom lives. Their student experiences in the university and teacher education constitute the second chronology. Student teaching furnishes the third chronology.. constructing relationships that were unavailable during their student lives. A fourth chronology begins once the student teacher becomes a newly arrived teacher. (p56)

Britzman's reminder to her readers that life is not a static experience reflects on the development of a subject in becoming a teaching self. 'Culture is where identities, desires and investments are mobilized, constructed and reworked. To speak and act as if there is one monolithic culture of teachers, students and schools is to take up a discourse that is at once authoritative and impossible' Britzman (p57). From a similar position then, I would argue that the experienced teacher operates from a particular socio-cultural position, where their professional 'regime of truth' can dominate and shape the development of a newly appointed teacher. The perceived inexperienced teacher is as an empty vessel, waiting to be filled with the acquired specialist knowledge supplied by their experienced colleagues.

## Fertile ground for research

So far in this paper I have put forward four propositions that warrant further investigation. **Firstly**, a suggestion to map the professional support culture for newly appointed teachers in NSW state schools to gauge current levels of practices and programs in orientation, induction, mentoring and collegial networks. **Secondly**, that the principles, processes and substance of newly appointed teacher professional learning programs are problematic- whilst well-organised and systematic policies and resources are available, delivery and evaluation is homogenous, inconsistent and optional. **Thirdly**, that newly appointed teachers have the potential to effect school improvement and pedagogical reform but are inhibited from doing so because of existing regimes of truth about successful teaching when they enter into their first appointment in schools. **Finally**, I have put forward the notion that we shift the focus for professional support from an assumption of deficit to a focus on the professional capital that newly appointed teachers bring to education in their journey from becoming to being a teacher.

A review of the literature on support for new teachers discussed so far in this paper revealed a number of underlying significant issues for further enquiry. Attrition rates are disproportionately high for teachers in their first years in the USA, UK and Australia. In Australia and in NSW in particular, 'baby boomer' teachers are exiting the profession at a rapid rate, to be replaced by a new generation who separate most alarmingly in their first three to five years following entry to the profession. Moreover, the youngest age group of new teachers represents the highest resignation rate in NSW state schools. These issues particularly affect schools in rural and remote areas and priority or 'hard to staff' schools who often find themselves in a staffing crisis when new teachers leave their appointments soon after entry. Issues with location, place and space also warrant investigation, as 'place matters in quality teaching and learning' (McConaghy, 2002, p1).

Issues surrounding recruitment and retention through professional support programs in the NSW DET also merit attention. An extensive campaign to recruit high quality teacher education students is underway, seeking high scoring HSC graduates, current teacher education students in priority areas such as Mathematics, English and Design and Technology, mature age candidates and experienced workers looking for a promising career change. This recruitment campaign is complemented by a pilot project for teacher mentors where exemplary classroom teachers are allocated to schools with high cohorts of newly appointed teachers to provide explicit professional support programs. Furthermore, a systematic and well-planned suite of resources are provided by the Professional Support and Curriculum Directorate to support school personnel engaged in the provision and delivery of professional learning programs for newly appointed teachers. The appointment of two Academic Associates: Teacher Education to districts/universities is also an example of the DET's commitment to finding ways of lowering attrition rates by providing professional support for newly appointed teachers in rural and remote areas.

## Engaging with the research issues

In July 2001 I was appointed by merit selection to the new position of Academic Associate: Teacher Education, a conjoint partnership between the DET, Tamworth District and the University of Newcastle. As discussed in the Working Papers (DET, 2001) partnerships have developed over the last decade between the DET and universities 'to facilitate the integration of the theory and practice elements of initial and continuing teacher education' (p1). Part of the position brief is also to manage, coordinate and deliver district induction and professional support programs for newly appointed teachers and their principals, supervisors and mentors. It is from this position then that I have been privileged to be both a participant and an observer in the journey that new teachers experience in becoming and being a teacher.

As a lecturer and tutor in teacher education courses and a professional support consultant in schools, I have maintained an ongoing dialogue with preservice teachers in the academy and newly appointed teachers in rural and remote schools. They have shared their thoughts about what they imagine teaching will be like, what they experience in real situations in schools and how they reflect on being a teacher compared to becoming a teacher. It seemed to me that they were telling a story, weaving dreams and desires for how they would teach their students. My great concern, lying quietly beneath these dialogues, was reflected in the literature and research findings reviewed as part of my study: that up to fifty percent of these enthusiastic and energetic teachers would be lost to us in the public education system in their first five years of teaching.

### **Exploring the research design**

My project has now developed into finding ways to explore and interpret the lives and experiences of newly appointed teachers in rural and remote schools in their first year of appointment to schools. The research findings and recommendations from this study should assist policy-makers, teacher educators and schools in perceiving new ways of recruiting and retaining teachers to the public education system. I intend that a mid-year cohort of graduates, who will be undertaking their internship in the first months of 2003, will be my target group of teachers to participate in my study, briefly outlined below.

#### *Context*

The retention of new teachers in their first years is of major concern to education authorities, teacher education institutions and schools.

So, why do new teachers leave their schools in the first years of appointment?

The literature provides evidence that low levels of support are a major reason.

#### *Research Questions*

What are the principles processes and practices that best support teachers in their first year of appointment? To rural and remote schools?

What are their imagined, real and reflective experiences?

How can an exploration of their 'telling tales' develop and understanding of why new teachers stay or leave teaching?

#### *Theoretical framework*

Three possible dimensions of support: professional, pedagogical and personal. Each dimension containing characteristics that describe the style or kind of support evident in policy documents, resources, practice and dialogue. An ideal program?

#### *Case Studies*

To take the theoretical research a step further into the practical domain, the framework will be tested against what happens (what actually support is provided) to a group of first year teachers. Following ethics approval the internship graduate cohort will be invited to participate in the study.

### *Procedure*

- Questionnaire distributed at final lectures for EDUC 4077 (these lectures include a basic induction to the DET)
- Respondents who agree to participate are contacted following questionnaire analysis
- Before they arrive at their new school the participants write a letter: an unstructured narrative describing how they imagine their first teaching experience will be
- Participants will be encouraged to keep a journal (preferably electronic to facilitate e-mail communication and discussion with each other as part of a collegial network)
- During the first and second terms, a semi structured interview at the school site (participants discuss/describe the real experience)
- During the third term - a focus group where the participants physically meet to share and discuss their imagined and real experiences. Workshops on reflective practices
- During the final term- a letter and semi-structured interview followed by a debriefing that reflects on their first year of teaching

### *Data Analysis*

Textual and discourse analysis will be used uncover and interpret themes and messages that emerge from the new teachers 'telling tales', the stories of their first year of experience in schools and the professional support that was provided.

### *Research Findings. Conclusions and Recommendations*

It is hoped that the outcome of the research project will be able to give **the newly appointed teachers' perspectives** on the professional support that is provided to new teachers and how these strategies can assist, or indeed inhibit, new teacher retention and professional growth.

### **The journey continues**

This paper began with an intent to investigate the tensions that might exist between the recruitment and retention of newly appointed teachers in schools and to propose that the professional, pedagogical and personal support of new teachers is a strategy which can provide schools with improved retention rates. Following a review of the literature and evidence available, I have put forward the notion that in examining and analyzing the policies, principles and practices that support newly appointed teachers, we may need to unpack and reassemble approaches to professional learning programs for newly appointed teachers. By listening to new teachers voices in the stories they tell from their first year of experience in country schools, we may develop a new understanding of how to approach and capitalize on the strengths they bring to education and their potential to improve schools. The proposed research project has the potential to inform and influence education policy on professional support and new teacher learning. In my search to find out what happens to our new teachers as they continue their journey of becoming and being teachers, I hope to find uncharted territory and experiences yet to be explored. I believe the stories not yet told are the greatest of adventures, mapped by new teachers in their voices.

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