Beginning Teachers: An AARE Response

Dr Kathy Jordan, RMIT University, Kathy.jordan@rmit.edu.au
Dr Jennifer Elsden-Clifton, RMIT University, Jennifer.elsden-clifton@rmit.edu.au

Abstract

Beginning teachers face numerous challenges upon entering the profession. These challenges have been the subject of considerable research, as well as national and state government reports and policy, and numerous specialised programs including mentoring and online support networks and initiatives. This paper attempts to consolidate some of this research by reviewing a span of papers published through the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE). Specifically, it provides a meta-analysis of conference papers and Australian Educational Researcher (AER) journal articles from the past 16 years (from 1994 to 2010), to identify trends in relation to the researcher (university affiliation and gender) scope of research methodology (length and type of study), forms of data collection and analyses, and participants in this research, with particular attention to gender and school teaching sector.

Beginning Teachers: The issue that won’t go away

Each year schools attract and appoint a new cohort of beginning teachers into the profession. Research shows that the transition from pre-service teacher education to becoming a classroom teacher is crucial as it shapes future teaching patterns and practices and influences teacher retention (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). These high stakes have resulted in government departments of education across Australia and internationally, to propose a variety of initiatives, programs and policy in an attempt to play a role in the development of teaching practices and identity and to positively impact on retention. Within Australia there has been a variety of approaches to support beginning teachers such as state-wide mentoring programs, toolkits and strategies (e.g. Flying Start, Queensland), modification of teaching loads (e.g. Beginning Teacher Time Release program, Tasmania), professional learning targeting beginning teachers (e.g. Supporting New Teacher’s Practices program, Victoria), school-based induction requirements and targeted policy for beginning teachers (across most states of Australia).

Much research has been conducted on the challenges beginning teacher encounter, the impact of initiatives and programs, their developing professional identity in shifting social and cultural contexts, and the ways in which they may be supported during this period, both within Australia (Doecke, Brown & Loughran 2000; McCormack, Gore & Thomas, 2006) and internationally (Gilles, Cramer & Hwang, 2001; Wang, Odl & Schwille 2008; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). This paper adds to this research by analysing the past 16 years of AARE conference papers and AER journal articles that specifically focus on beginning teachers as a means of capturing the scope of this research and to explore the trends that have emerged over time. In particular, this paper will analyse some of specificities of the research around beginning teachers such as forms of data collection and analyses, and participants in this research, with particular attention to gender and school teaching sector.
Australian Association of Research in Education

The broad aim of this paper is to more clearly understand what we already know about research relating to beginning teachers within an Australian context and to then suggest ways of moving this research agenda forward. To do so, we draw exclusively on research published by Australia’s leading education research association, the Australian Association for Researchers in Education (AARE).

AARE is the national association for fostering educational research in Australia. This organisation was established in 1970 and provides support and a forum for researchers from Australian and international universities, local, State and Federal governments, schools, colleges and training organisations. Through a complement of conferences, workshops, and publications, the association provides a space for the discussion and dissemination of topical and current educational research. Two of the main forms of publication include the Australian Educational Researcher (AER) journal and the AARE annual conference. The Australian Educational Research Journal is an international, peer reviewed journal, published three times per year. This journal aims to promote understandings of educational issues, debate current issues and inform policy. The AARE also facilitates an annual conference of educational researchers which is seen as the primary forum in Australia for supporting and disseminating research across numerous educational fields. From 1994, AARE has published papers from its annual conference on its website accessible at www.aare.edu.au.

Conference papers and journal articles published by AARE can be seen as reflecting the key research agendas relating to education in Australia. For our research, this data set provides a representative sample of the research being conducted around the issue of beginning teachers. This review focuses on research relating to practising beginning teachers in their first years of teaching and covers the years 1994-2010. Specifically, this review considers: Where is this research published? What has been the focus of research relating to beginning teachers? What methodologies have been used for this research? Who are the researchers researching beginning teachers?

Research Method

This paper reviews how beginning teachers have featured in AARE conference papers and its print journal, the Australian Educational Researcher for the years 1994-2010. A meta-analysis approach was used as it provides an effective way of synthesising results from multiple studies and in doing so identifying patterns in research (Schmidt, 1992). This approach has been used within the
education field in multiple ways to explore impacts on students’ learning (Hattie & Timperley, 2007), exploring social and cultural issues within schools (Sirin, 2005) and examining the impacts of initiatives and programs within education (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). A search was made on the AARE website (www.aare.edu.au) for abstract titles using the search terms ‘beginning’ and ‘early career’. Some 65 abstracts were initially returned, but this was refined to 42. Some 8 papers were discounted as a copy was not available online on this site, or in the case of AER papers, accessible from its site. A further 15 were discounted as they were not based on research relating to practising beginning teachers in their first few years of teaching.

In summary, a research paper was added to the sample if it met the following criteria:

• Full paper was available online through the AARE website
• Included “beginning” or “early career” in the abstract title of the paper
• Had a research focus (excluded literature review)
• Specifically researched beginning teachers (not a pre-service focus)

There were some issues collecting this data stemming from the way it is stored on the AARE website. As acknowledged on the site, some data is missing as not all papers included an abstract, and some abstracts do not have an accompanying paper. As well, some pieces of information about data have not been consistently reported on the website and have therefore not figured in this review. For example, it is not known whether conference papers were actually presented, whether they were refereed or not, or whether they formed part of a symposium.

Full papers retrieved from this initial key word search were then analysed and data categorised to suit the broad aims of the review: research focus, research methodology and the researcher. It is to be noted that research results from papers is not a part of this review.

Findings

a. AARE publication type

Some 42 papers met the selection criteria and were counted in this review as shown in Appendix 1: Paper overview. Of these, the vast majority, some 38 were conference papers, with only 4 papers being journal papers published in the Australian Educational Researcher. These 4 journal papers were Goddard and Goddard’s (2006) large scale survey of ‘burnout’ among 112 beginning teachers, Huntly’s (2008) study of competency according to beginning teachers, Loughran’s (1996) three year study of 17 beginning science teachers, and finally Loughran, Mitchell, Neale, and Toussaint’s (2001) study of how the PEEL program (Project for enhancement of effective learning)
impacted on 2 beginning teacher experiences. Two of these print papers, that by Goddard and Goddard (2006) and Loughran (1996), had links to content reported in conference papers.

b. The Research Focus
In the main, papers included in this review focused on three areas of research relating to beginning teachers: beginning teacher experience, a particular intervention such as a program or practice, and retention of beginning teachers. As seen in Table 1: Focus of paper, over half of the papers related to these three issues. Some 14 papers related to beginning teacher experience, 8 to an intervention and 6 to retention.

Table 1: Focus of papers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus of papers</th>
<th>Number of papers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beginning Teacher experience</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retention / Attrition</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Induction</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Papers were published over the 16 year period of this review, with the number published in any one year varying considerably from none in 1998, 2005, and 2010, to 6 in 2006. In the main, several papers were published in a given year. However almost half of the papers, some 18 were published in the years, 1994, 1997, 2001, and 2006. A closer analysis of the papers in these four years does not reveal any trends in their specific focus.

To summarise, the vast majority of papers published by AARE were conference papers, with only 4 papers being published in its print journal. In the main conference papers were published in each year of this review, yet, almost half were published in the years 1994, 1997, 2001, and 2006.
Three issues dominated research relating to beginning teachers: beginning teacher experience, an intervention, and retention.

c. The Research Methodology

Discussion now turns to how beginning teacher research has been conducted. It begins by considering the participants in this research by analysing the number of participants, their gender, their school setting (such as primary or secondary) as well as school type (such as rural or metropolitan) and school sector (state, Catholic or Independent). Then it considers the nature of this research, including its length, and whether qualitative or quantitative in nature. It then proceeds to a more detailed examination of the particular data collection methods used in this research.

In the main research on beginning teachers has involved a small number of participants, with over half of the papers, some 28, involving between 1 and 30 participants. A high proportion of these, some 13 papers, involved under 5 participants, with a further 9 papers involving between 10 and 20 participants, and 6 involving between 20 and 30. There were some 8 studies involving large numbers of participants of 90 or more. As will be explored later in this discussion, in the main these larger studies involved survey data.

The majority of papers, some 36, did not explicitly articulate the gender of participants. Of the few who did it was interesting that one study involved all female beginning teachers, that by Ginns et al (1997), and another, that by Moore and Knight (2006) involved all males. Some papers also involved participants from particular disciplines. For example, Health and Physical Education participants were the subject of research by McCormack and Thomas (2001) and Macdonald (1995), while Science beginning teachers were subjects in Loughran’s (1994, 1996) study.

Research has been conducted somewhat more often in secondary settings, compared to other settings. Some 13 studies involved the secondary sector, 6 involved primary, 8 involved both secondary and primary, and some 3 involved settings combining early childhood, primary and secondary. Some 11 papers did not explicitly state the school sector. Whether beginning teachers were employed in metropolitan or rural settings was usually not specified by 30 of the 42 papers and those who did usually combined these settings. Often as well, whether research was conducted in state, Catholic or independent sectors, was not specified. Moore and Knight’s (2006) study which included beginning teachers from Catholic and state schools, and Whiting and Cusworth’s (1994) study involving state, independent and Catholic beginning teachers were some exceptions.
In relation to the nature of research, a qualitative research methodology was predominately used. Only 3 papers used a quantitative methodology, and these involved large scale survey data on the issue of retention or burnout. Goddard and Goddard (2006) involved a survey of 112 beginning teachers, Goddard and O’Brien (2003) involved 123 beginning teachers, and Goddard and O’Brien (2006) 100 beginning teachers. Some 5 papers reported a qualitative and quantitative methodology, with all of these using a survey instrument to collect quantitative data and often involved a large number of participants. Carter and Francis’s (2000) study around mentoring involved some 220 beginning teachers and 245 mentors, and Gore, William and Ladwid’s (2006) study around a pedagogical intervention involved some 206 beginning teachers and 775 experienced teachers in their second cohort, and Yuen-Fun’s (2003) study around beginning teacher experience involved 207 beginning teachers.

In the main research has been conducted in a short time period, with some 11 studies reporting a 1 year research period, and a further 7 under 1 year. The length of research was often not explicitly reported, with some 20 of the papers included in this review not doing so. There appears to be no correlation between the length of research and the number of participants, that is both smaller and longer studies involved both a small number of participants and a larger number of participants. For example Dewar’s 2004 study conducted over 6 months involved 1 secondary beginning teacher, Crearar’s (2009) study over a year also involved 1 drama teacher, herself, and Kane’s (1994), 2 year study involved 2 secondary beginning teachers. Goddard and O’Brien’s (2003) study over 6 months involved 123 primary and secondary beginning teachers with a second degree, Carter and Francis’s (2000) study over a year also involved a large number of participants, some 220 primary and secondary beginning teachers and 245 mentors, and Cameron’s (2001) longitudinal study over 5 years, with separate cohorts each year involving some 52 beginning teachers and 35 experienced teachers. There also appears to be no correlation between the research length and research focus. Research relating to beginning teacher experience was conducted over 3 school terms by Sparrow and Frid (2001), to 1 year in several studies (Crerar, 2009; Lang, 1999; McCormack, Gore and Thomas, 2004) and 3 years (Loughran, 1996). Often the length of research was not specified, as was the case in some 20 papers.

In relation to the sorts of data collected, the use of interview was most common, being used in some 26 papers. In the main research that used interview data involved smaller number of participants, with 17 of these papers having between 1 and 20 participants. While some of these 26 papers, had large numbers of participants, for example, Cameron (2001) with 87, McCormack and Thomas (2002) 73, Whiting and Cusworth (1994) 132, and Yuen-Fun, (2003) some 207, not all...
participants were the subject of interview. There appears to be no correlation between the choices of interview as a means of collecting data with the research focus.

Survey data was also commonly collected in some 17 papers. Of these 17 papers, some involved a smaller number of participants, with 5 papers involving between 1 to 30 participants. Some 8 papers involved significantly larger number of participants, with 8 involving over 100 participants, with 5 of these being between 100 to 200, 1 between 200 and 300 and 2 over 400 participants. A survey instrument was used to collect data about a range of issues relating to beginning teachers, and there did not seem to be a correlation with the focus of research. Some papers did include other types of data collection. For example some 7 papers used a participant diary or journal, and 8 used observation. Some 7 papers also used case studies.

To summarise, most of the papers in this review were small scale. They involved a small number of participants, often under 30 participants, and often were conducted for a year or less. Secondary teachers have been the subject of this research somewhat more often than other groups such as primary and early childhood. The gender of participants was not recorded in the majority of instances, so too whether they taught in rural or metropolitan schools and whether these schools were in the state, Catholic or independent sector. The majority of papers were qualitative in nature and tended to involve interview and survey data.

d. The Researcher

Of the 42 papers included in this review, 16 were written by one researcher, compared with 26 written by more than one. The majority of researchers who co-wrote papers did so with colleagues from their own institution. There were two exceptions, Goddard and O’Brien from Griffith University and the University of Southern Queensland, and Smith and Garvis (2009) from the University of Queensland and Griffith University. Slightly more females that males produced this research, with 18 papers being produced by female researchers, 12 by male researchers and some 10 by both male and female researchers.

The overwhelming majority of researchers included in this review work in Australian institutions. There were a few exceptions with that by Lang (1999) from the University of Waikato in New Zealand, and Yuen-Fun (2003) from Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. These Australian researchers work across Australia’s states except Tasmania, and draw from 16 different institutions. However in the main these are not ‘Top 8 institutions’, with only some 9 papers emanated from these institutions, with University of Melbourne publishing 3 and Monash University 4. These four involved the research of Loughran and others relating to beginning teacher
experience and the effect of the PEEL program on their experience. While most of these 16 institutions produced one or two papers over the period of this review, two institutions produced more than others; the University of Newcastle in NSW produced 8 papers mainly through the research efforts of McCormack, Gore and Thomas, relating to beginning teacher experience and mentoring, and the University of Southern Queensland, 4, through the efforts of Goddard and O’Brien and their research relating to retention.

To summarise, researchers researching beginning teachers come from 16 institutions across Australia, and when they co-wrote they tended to do so with colleagues from the same institution. Slightly more female researchers than male researchers have conducted this research.

Conclusions and Future Research Suggestions

The aim of this research was to explore gaps in the research base and to identify relevant questions that have not been addressed in relation to beginning teachers in Australia’s research and may therefore, warrant further research. So what broad conclusions can we make about the way beginning teachers have been researched over almost twenty years (1994-2010), using AARE publications as the source for this analysis?

Firstly, the majority of this research has been published as conference papers with very few papers being published in AARE’s journal, the Australian Educational Researcher. Given that this journal does have a broad audience, the relatively low number of papers is not all that unexpected. However given the sometimes national focus of issues relating to beginning teachers in reports and policy, this lack of attention is perhaps suggesting that issues relating to beginning teachers are not treated as suitable to a wide audience of education researchers.

Secondly, research relating to beginning teachers has continued to be of interest to the research community generally over the review period, as evidenced by the number of years in this review in which papers relating to beginning teachers have been published. Some periods, including the years 1994, 1997, 2001, have featured more papers however a more detailed exploration of possible reasons is outside the scope of this paper.

Third, three particular issues or topics relating to beginning have featured in research and across the years of the review period. These three topics are beginning teacher experience, an intervention and retention. It is to be noted that while research has been categorised for the purposes of this review, research is still very individual in nature. Yet the number of papers around these three topics or themes does perhaps suggest that it could be opportune to draw together
research conclusions from these three focus areas in order to consolidate and move the research agenda further.

Fourth, most of this research has been small scale involving both a relatively small number of participants and study period. Often secondary beginning teachers were featured in this research, with early childhood beginning teachers in particular being under-represented in research. Arguably then researchers have been interested in close and detailed examinations of beliefs and practices, rather than more large scale perhaps impersonal ones. This is further suggested by the common use of a qualitative framework, and the dominant use of interview as a means of collecting data, often associated with a small number of participants. The small scale of this research does tend to suggest that researchers have been interested in understanding ‘the particularities’ of beginning teacher experience, yet the large number of papers who did not specify details about the participants including their gender, school setting, type and sector could suggest otherwise. As such future research could perhaps focus more on understanding this experience from ‘situated’ positions.

Fifth, researchers researching beginning teachers are located within institutions across Australia and outside ‘the big 8’. This does tend to suggest that beginning teacher research is not considered as important to these institutions.

This analysis of the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) conference papers and journal articles in Australian Educational Researcher (AER) during the years 1994 to 2010 has shown that there has been considerable research interest in beginning teachers, particularly around their experience, a particular intervention such as a program or practice, and retention. It has shown that there are gaps and silences in the research landscape of beginning teachers. Therefore, there is much potential to learn more about the complexities of beginning teachers and hopefully, through this targeted research agenda explore ways to retain and support quality beginning teachers.
References

* Indicates a paper included in the sample.


# Appendix 1: Paper overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YR</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Total number of papers for that year</th>
<th>Number of AARE conference papers</th>
<th>Number of AER papers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1994 | Kane, R.  
Loughran, J.  
Martinez, K., & McNally, P.  
Nimmo, G., & Smith, D.  
Whiting, P. R., & Cusworth, R. | 5 | 5 | 0 |
| 1995 | Macdonald, D.  
Nimmo, G., & Smith, D.  
Williams, D. | 3 | 3 | 0 |
| 1996 | Loughran, J. | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 1997 | Brown, J., Doecke, B., & Loughran, J.  
Carter,, M.  
Ginns, I., Atweh, B., Watters, J., & Heirdsfield, A.  
Tome, C. | 4 | 4 | 0 |
| 1998 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 1999 | Lang, C. | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| 2000 | Carter, M., & Francis, R. | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| 2001 | Cameron, R. B.  
Loughran, J., Mitchell, I., Neale, R., & Toussaint, D.  
McCormack, A., & Thomas, K.  
Sparrow, L., & Frid, S. | 4 | 3 | 1 |
| 2002 | Britt, C. & Sumption, J.  
Kiggins, J., & Gibson, S.  
McCormack, A., & Thomas, K. | 3 | 3 | 0 |
| 2003 | Goddard, R., & O’Brien, P.  
White, J., & Moss, J.  
Yuen-Fun, L. W. | 3 | 3 | 0 |
| 2004 | Dewar, D.  
McCormack, A., Gore, J., & Thomas, K.  
Williams, C., Gore, J., & Cooper, S. | 3 | 3 | 0 |
| 2005 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2006 | Goddard, R., & Goddard, M.  
Goddard, R., & O’Brien, P.  
Gore, J., Williams, C., & Ladwig, J.  
Moore, T., & Knight, B.  
Peters, J., & Le Cornu, R.  
Sharp, H. | 6 | 5 | 1 |
| 2007 | McCormack, A.  
O’Brien, P., Keefe, M., & Goddard, R. | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| 2008 | Ferguson-Patrick, K.  
Huntly, H.  
McCormack, A., & Gore, J. | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 2009 | Crerar, M.  
Kirkby, J.  
Smith, N., & Garvis, S. | 3 | 3 | 0 |
| 2010 | 0 | 0 | 0 |