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Career Crossroads: A Delphi study of the motivations and concerns of mid-career teachers in NSW Department of Education and Communities primary schools

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Career Crossroads: A Delphi study of the motivations and concerns of mid-career teachers in NSW Department of Education and Communities primary schools

Abstract

The last decade has been marked by rapid educational change (OECD, 2005), with a renewed focus on teacher accountability. Research has shown that excellence in teaching is the single most powerful influence on student achievement (Hattie, 2003); however, some teachers “survive and flourish, others fall by the wayside” (Day and Gu, 2010, p. 1). It is vital, therefore, to be able to understand the conditions that determine the difference. Yet research into the working lives of mid-career teachers, defined as teachers with between 8 to 15 years teaching experience, who are a significant and experienced part of our teaching population, has until recently, been limited. This Australian study investigates broad themes relating to the motivations and concerns of mid-career teachers in NSW Department of Education and Communities (NSW DEC)¹ primary schools. Using the Delphi method (Skulmoski, Hartman and Krahn, 2007), thirty two statements of key motivations and concerns for mid-career teachers were found, revealing that mid-career teachers are motivated by professional ideals, beliefs and values but are concerned by more practical issues that block their achievement. Knowledge gained from this Delphi study provides a new educational lens through which to view the work of highly professional, mid-career teachers, with implications for educational leadership.

¹ Previously known as NSW Department of Education and Training (NSW DET). For consistency, the current name NSW Department of Education and Communities (NSW DEC), will be used in this paper.

Introduction

Teachers' work is complex and multifaceted (Pillay, Goddard and Wilss, 2005). Teachers have to deal with an ever changing work environment in which they are not only expected to teach effectively, but also to continually upgrade their knowledge and skills, keep up to date with technological innovation and deal with students, parents and community demands. The result of the increasing demands on teachers in the workplace has been increased attrition rates and 'burnout' levels (Ramsey, 2000; Pillay, Goddard and Wilss, 2005). This has implications for teachers' well-being and competence, especially at transition points in their careers. The attrition of beginning teachers to the profession is well documented (DEST, 2003) but less well known are the factors impacting on mid-career professionals.

Many countries across the world are faced with an ageing teaching workforce. On average, 25% of primary teachers are over 50 years, and in some countries, including Australia, more than 40% of the teachers are in this age group (OECD, 2005). As a result, internationally, concerns arising from these changes in teacher demographics have largely focussed on finding ways to attract and retain new teachers into the profession. Little attention has been given to mid-career teachers currently in the profession. In NSW alone, mid-career teachers comprise over 30% of the current workforce (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2009). It is expected that the impending retirement of many veteran teachers will require mid-career teachers to fill the vacant leadership roles, which will be crucial for achieving leadership sustainability across educational organisations. These factors highlight the urgency with which the needs of mid-career teachers must be addressed.

Almost three decades ago, Kram (1983) identified the mid-career phase as a difficult period of reassessment and reappraisal, when "life is half over and one's career has been fairly-well determined" (p. 609). However little attention has been given to the support and further development of experienced teachers during the mid period of their careers (Mtetwa and Thompson, 2000). In 2005, Hargreaves found in his study of 50 Canadian teachers, that:

Mid-career teachers were typically more relaxed, experienced and comfortable about their job and themselves than they had once been, but still enthusiastic and flexible enough to respond to change in a broadly positive way. There were rare exceptions to this trend...who felt 'disenchanted, disillusioned, frustrated, overworked and unappreciated.'

(Hargreaves, 2005, p. 979)

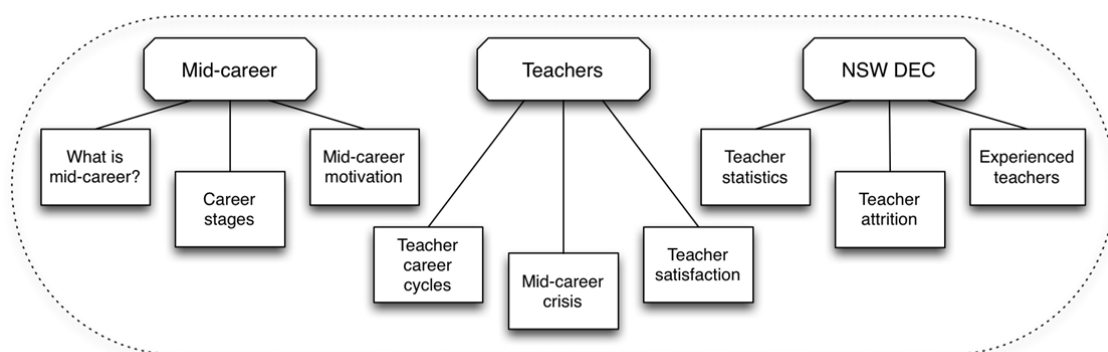
Corresponding to this, research in the United Kingdom by Christopher Day and his team, has found that mid-career teachers could be differentiated into two distinct groups: those with sustained engagement in their work and those described as feeling a sense of detachment and a loss of motivation (Day et al., 2007). Identifying motivations which relate to teacher engagement, commitment and persistence “is a critical next step” (Watt and Richardson, 2008, p. 408) in understanding factors relating to teacher quality. The presence or absence of motivation is clearly an important contributing factor in being an effective teacher (Dinham, Ingvarson and Kleinhenz, 2008), so it is essential that a better understanding of the motivations and concerns of mid-career teachers be developed.

This Delphi study, undertaken in 2010, aimed to help fill this gap in knowledge by beginning to build a rich, descriptive picture of the professional and personal motivations and concerns of mid-career teachers in an Australian context, specifically NSW DEC primary schools. The over arching research question being asked is: *What are the professional and personal motivations and concerns experienced by mid-career teachers in NSW DEC primary schools?* Implicit in answering this question is the subsequent question: *How can educational leaders enhance the effectiveness of mid-career teachers on student outcomes?* Knowing how to support mid-career teachers should result in improved organisational effectiveness, particularly in relation to the core business of schools: improving student outcomes.

Literature review

Literature underpinning this research project provides a three-pronged foundation for conceptualising the professional lives of mid-career teachers through an investigation of the contexts of mid-career, teachers themselves and the specific organisational context of the NSW DEC. Literature related to the motivations and concerns of workers is broad and cross-disciplinary, as is the literature related to the concept of mid-career workers. However literature related to the nexus of the two, the motivations and concerns of mid-career professionals, specifically mid-career teachers, has been limited, until the recent work of Christopher Day, Qing Gu (Day et al., 2007; Day and Gu, 2010) and their team.

FIGURE 1: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



Mid-career

The concept of mid-career is not new in literature and can be found in vocational, business and psychology journals, although it is less frequently referred to in the education sector. To develop a picture of mid-career, three main areas need to be expanded: defining and describing what mid-career means; looking at career stage theory; and, to contextualise this study, developing an understanding of mid-career motivation.

Mid-career has been defined in terms of age (Rush, Peacock and Milkovich, 1980; Bassett, 1996), tenure in a position (Morrow and McElroy, 1987), duration in an occupation

(Mount, 1984) and time in the workforce (Hall and Mansfield, 1975; Gould, 1979). Evidence shows that in Australia teaching is an aging profession (DEST, 2003) and although primary teachers have been teaching for an average of 17 years, approximately 9% have been teaching more than 30 years (McKenzie et al., 2008). For the purposes of this study, mid-career teachers in Australia are defined as those teachers who have been teaching for approximately 8–15 years (DEST, 2003; NSW Department of Education and Training, 2009). In 2007 Christopher Day and his team (Day et al.) defined six professional life phases of teachers in the United Kingdom and their third phase, Professional life phase 8–15, matches this definition.

Related to the concept of mid-career, is a general body of work based on the seminal work of Super (1957) describing career stages. Super's four stages career cycle (Super, 1957) is important as it linked the stage of stabilisation, involving the development of one's identity within a profession, and maintenance, where individuals tend to be established in their career and lifestyle (Williams and Fox, 1995). Williams and Fox (1995) indicate that "mid-career corresponds to the stabilization stage" (p.353) although the division between stages is a grey area and varies between individuals. Variables such as age, personality, personal motivation, work environment and levels of satisfaction impact on individuals throughout their careers and contribute to the blurring of stages.

Building an image of what is known about mid-career workers is helpful in understanding some of the issues impacting on their lives. Williams and Fox (1995) argue that mid-career professionals can be characterised by both psychological and biological maturity, peak career performance, well-developed professional networks and job stability. Typically, although mid-career workers have overall job satisfaction, at this stage in their lives they start putting higher value on non-work activities, such as family and lifestyle (Williams and Fox, 1995). Some enter a "mid-life crisis" period, having become more aware of their own mortality and unachieved goals. They become more focussed on changing

relationships with others and there is an increasing divergence between work and non-work activities (Williams and Fox, 1995). This was confirmed by Day and the VITAE (Variations in Teachers' Work, Lives and their Effects on Pupils) research team who found that mid-career teachers faced "additional tensions in managing change in both their professional and personal lives" (Day et al., 2007, p. 82).

Developing an understanding of what motivates mid-career workers further contributes to our image of what mid-career looks like. Personal motivation influences critical career decision making or, in some cases, lack of decision making, and explains behaviour that often is not commensurate with a person's ability (London, 1983). In their synthesis of literature, Williams and Fox (1995) outline and discuss several issues of mid-career motivation. They allude to the difference between mid-career workers who view their work as a 'job' as opposed to a 'career', which is profound. They refer to job-oriented workers whose motivation is linked to rewards such as financial benefits, who tend to be self-serving and less productive, resulting in greater stress, job dissatisfaction and burnout. In contrast, career-oriented workers, who perceive their career as part of a life plan, are motivated more by intrinsic rewards and their desire to achieve professional and personal goals. A critical factor in understanding the mid-career worker who has reached a stage of peak performance is the desire to apply and develop professional skills in the workplace.

The ability of organisations to facilitate opportunities can be instrumental in re-energising mid-career workers. Without organisational support, personal motivation is harder to maintain and may result in a mid-career worker shifting their focus from work to family or other issues. In turn, this can lead to a career plateau point (Ference, Stoner and Warren, 1977) and this has consequences for both the mid-career professional and the organisation.

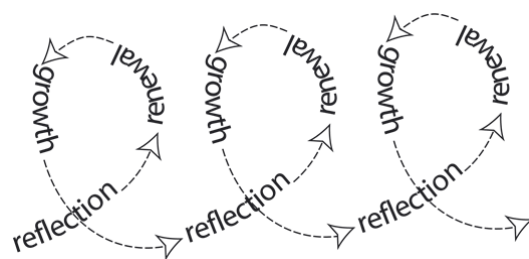
Teachers

Literature related to teachers' career development recognise that "teachers have different attitudes, knowledge, skills and behaviours at various points during their career" (Lynn, 2002, p. 179). In order to better understand mid-career teachers, three fields of literature contribute to our knowledge: teacher career cycles; the concept of mid-career crisis; and conversely, teacher satisfaction.

Early teacher career stage models conceptualised teachers as moving through various differentiated stages in a linear fashion (Fessler, 1995; Day and Gu, 2010). However Fessler (1995) points out that these early models were simplistic in their approach, failing to adequately differentiate between mature teachers. Fessler's own *Teacher Career Cycle Model* (1995) identified eight career stages and situated the career cycle in context with influences from personal and organisational factors (Fessler, 1995). Later theories, such as *A Life Cycle Model for Career Teachers* (Steffy and Wolfe, 2001), proposed stages that reflect a teacher's acquisition and application of knowledge and skills throughout their career and beyond. This model, represented in Figure 1, proposed that teacher development, or lack of development, is relative to their engagement with learning in the work environment and the cyclical process of reflection–renewal–growth (Steffy and Wolfe, 2001). This cyclical process of regular, focused reflection is pivotal to continued growth throughout a teacher's career. In its absence, withdrawal and disengagement can result (Steffy and Wolfe, 2001).

FIGURE 2: REFLECTION — RENEWAL — GROWTH CYCLE

Adapted from Steffy and Wolfe, 2001



Collectively, literature on mid-career (Rosenholtz and Simpson, 1990; Pillay, Goddard and Wilss, 2005) builds an image of teachers at mid-career experiencing a variety of symptoms that impact on their ability to do their jobs effectively. Each model contributes aspects that often recur in life/career stage literature describing the idea of ‘mid-life crisis’. Symptoms such as frustration, disillusionment, feelings of routine, withdrawal, self-doubt and lack of control are evident (Huberman, 1989; Fessler, 1995; Steffy and Wolfe, 1998; McCormick and Barnett, 2008). It is a time when teachers reflect on their career to date and some question their career choice, contemplating a complete change (Holmes and Cartwright, 1994). However, in all models, most teachers move beyond this career midpoint, signalling either further stagnation or renewal. In either case, the professional learning that is offered can support and develop teachers in their professional practice, provided teachers actively engage with it.

In vocational literature there are studies of job satisfaction that link career stage, job complexity and job satisfaction (Gould, 1979; Morrow and McElroy, 1987). More recent studies, particularly the work of Dinham (1995; Dinham, 2000), Dinham and Scott (1996) and Scott, Dinham and Brooks (1999) contribute to the concept of satisfaction amongst teachers. Dinham’s earlier studies (1995) revealed empirical evidence of factors that contributed to both the satisfaction and dissatisfaction of teachers. He found that the greatest sources of teacher satisfaction were student, and the consequent teacher achievement. Other sources of satisfaction include having a positive impact on student attitude and behaviour, recognition of teachers’ work, the development of their own pedagogy and competency, and importantly, good relationships with all stakeholders. Less experienced teachers had a narrower focus, the

classroom, while more experienced teachers gained satisfaction from wider, whole school roles (Dinham, 1995). Sources of dissatisfaction were context specific factors such as school management, staffing and promotion procedures, and administrative and system demands. Overall, teacher satisfaction was seen to derive from the task of teaching whereas dissatisfaction arose from contextual, non-teaching factors (Dinham, 1995).

NSW Department of Education and Communities (NSW DEC)

The NSW DEC is a large, public education system. Background knowledge relating to the three areas of teacher statistics, teacher attrition and experienced teachers in this organisation provides a framework for understanding the context of the Delphi study.

In 2009, 33.8% of NSW DEC primary teachers were aged between 30 and 45 years (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2009), which aligns closely to teachers who had been teaching between 8 to 15 years and fits my operational definition of mid-career teachers in Australia. At the same time, 57.2% of primary teachers employed by the NSW DEC were over the age of 45. It is expected that these ‘baby boomers’ will retire by 2017, with the majority retiring between 2013 to 2015 (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2009). For example, during the year of my study, 2010, 76% of separations were due to retirement (NSW Department of Education and Communities, 2012). This age related profile highlights the importance of mid-career teachers in the NSW DEC. It is estimated that many of these mid-career teachers will continue to teach in NSW DEC primary schools for a further 15 to 20 years until retirement.

Within this decade, mid-career teachers will be the most experienced teachers in schools and will hold many of the key leadership and management positions in their organisations. Collectively they will bring considerable benefits to schools but it is also expected that additional resources will be needed to support and update their skills, knowledge and motivation (OECD, 2005). It is therefore essential for the motivations and

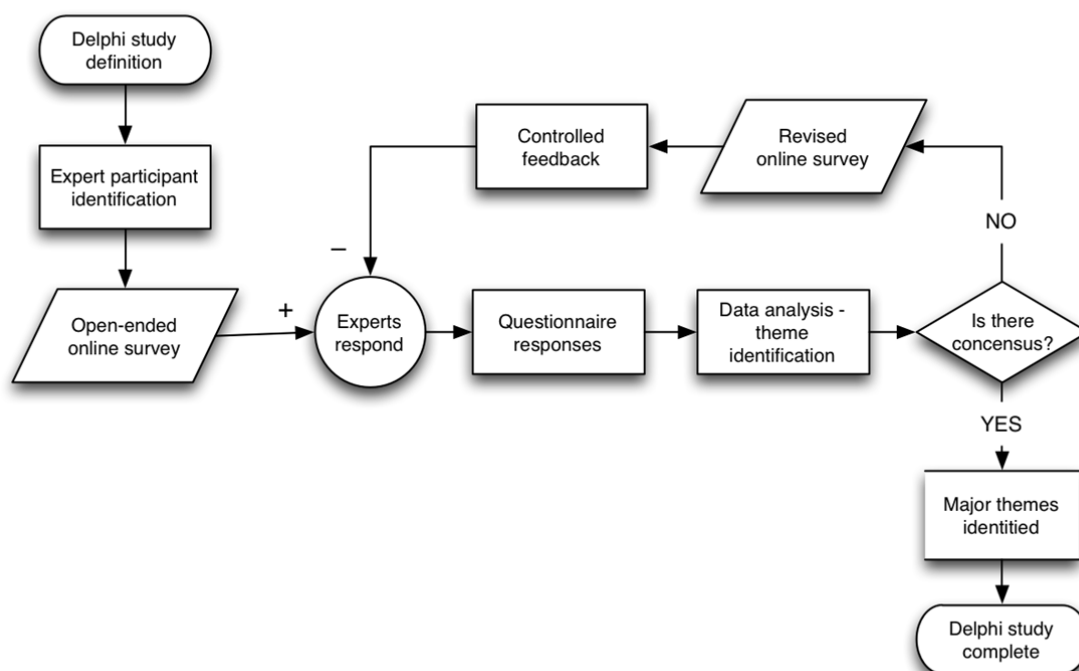
concerns of this group to be explored and that strategies to meet their specific professional needs be addressed.

The Delphi study

Methodology

In this research project the Delphi method was used based on the Schmidt ranking model (Schmidt et al., 2001). The Delphi method is a group (Delbecq, Van de Ven and Gustafson, 1975) and iterative process (Skulmoski, Hartman and Krahn, 2007) used to collect and refine the opinion of experts to gain consensus. As illustrated in Figure 3, the Delphi method uses as series of questionnaires interspersed with feedback to participants to obtain agreement from the individual expert panel members (Skulmoski, Hartman and Krahn, 2007).

FIGURE 3: SCHEMATIC REPRESENTATION OF DELPHI STUDY



Selection and recruitment of expert panel

While the *number* of expert panellists required for the Delphi method is not large, with 10 to 18 being sufficient (Paliwoda, 1983), selection of experts in any Delphi study is critical as the validity of the results is directly related to the *quality* of the experts chosen (Landeta, 2006). Mertens (2005) suggests that the expert panel should be professionally diverse and knowledgeable about the topic. Powell (2003) notes that as well as being knowledgeable in the area being investigated, experts should be chosen for their credibility with the target audience. Therefore, for this study, participants were chosen for knowledge of mid-career teachers in NSW DEC primary schools or because they were mid-career teachers themselves. Participants meeting these criteria were drawn from a cross section of NSW DEC settings. Ultimately an expert panel comprising of 6 Principals, 2 School Education Directors and 15 teachers² was formed and participated in the first round of the Delphi study.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection

In keeping with recommendations from literature (Powell, 2003; Keeney, Hasson and McKenna, 2006), a three round process was designed, consisting of questionnaires interspersed with controlled feedback from the researcher. The four areas of research undertaken were: professional motivations; personal motivations; professional concerns; and personal concerns. The initial questionnaire consisted of broad, open-ended questions (Delbecq, Van de Ven and Gustafson, 1975; Linstone and Turoff, 1975; Skulmoski, Hartman and Krahn, 2007) designed to capture the most important issues (Schmidt, 1997) as well as to provide a high degree of thick description (Geertz, 2010). A secure web-based delivery mode was used which enhanced the turnaround time between rounds (Okoli and Pawlowski, 2004) and improved the return rate. Between each survey round, the results were analysed, and then

² The teacher group consisted of both teachers who were either mid-career teachers themselves or were experienced executive teachers who had knowledge of and experience working with mid-career teachers.

returned to the panel members for re-consideration. The panel members completed the surveys at their own convenience within two weeks from the online release of each questionnaire. Sixteen participants completed the final survey. Attrition of participants is a common feature of the Delphi methodology resulting from the demands of three rounds of surveys and feedback over an extended period of time.

Thematic analysis

Data from Round 1 of the Delphi study was coded thematically and grouped into the four areas of investigation. This formed the basis of the questionnaire used in the next round of the study. In the second survey, panellists were asked to consider this information and to rank the themes for both motivations and concerns in order of importance in each area. These responses were then coded into more specific ranked themes. The final survey was designed to elicit any further detail related to the most common themes revealed and panellists were asked to re-rank them in order of importance, in all areas. Although the primary purpose was to elicit detailed information relating to professional and personal motivations and concerns, the ranking rounds also provided greater insight into their degree of importance on the professional and personal lives of mid-career teachers.

Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance

Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance can be used to indicate ranking consensus where values close to 0 indicate low agreement between participants in the ranking order and values close to 1 indicate high agreement (Schmidt, 1997). The rankings were analysed deriving the mean rank, the proportion of panel members ranking a particular motivation / concern in the top half of their rankings (see Tables 1, 2, 3 and 4), and Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance (Schmidt, 1997; Graham, 2010).

Results and Interpretation

At the end of Round 3, Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance indicated very weak agreement concerning the *relative importance* of the items under investigation. This result shows that although the final eight statements in each area of investigation were considered important by the participants, the ranking in order of importance is less significant. It is becoming increasingly clear that teachers respond to a variety of factors that impact on their professional and personal lives (Fessler, 1995; Day et al., 2007) and it is the interplay between many contributing factors from their personal and professional environments that impact on their perception of which factors are prime motivators or concerns for them. The blurring of the boundaries between personal and professional motivations and concerns was raised by a Delphi study participant who commented, "pretty much every [motivation and] concern I have could go in both [professional and personal] sections," confirming their interconnectedness and the holistic nature of teachers' work.

Analysis of Delphi study questionnaires

Results for the four areas of research are shown in Tables 1, 2, 3 and 4. Tables 1 and 2 relate to professional and personal *motivations* and Tables 3 and 4 relate to professional and personal *concerns*. However given the blurring of the boundaries between the professional and personal domains, I will discuss the results holistically in relation to *motivations* and *concerns* across the two domains.

Motivations of mid-career teachers

In light of the aging of the teaching workforce, many research studies have been undertaken worldwide in an effort to understand what attracts and motivates new teachers to choose teaching as their career (Kyriacou and Coulthard, 2000; OECD, 2005; Day et al., 2007; Watt and Richardson, 2008; Pop and Turner, 2009; Thomson, Turner and Nietfeld, 2012).

Kyriacou and Coulthard (2000) have summarised these findings as falling into three main areas:

(1) altruistic reasons: these reasons deal with seeing teaching as a socially worthwhile and important job, a desire to help children succeed, and a desire to help society improve;

(2) intrinsic reasons: these reasons cover aspects of the job activity itself, such as the activity of teaching children, and an interest in using their subject matter knowledge and expertise; and

(3) extrinsic reasons: these reasons cover aspects of the job which are not inherent in the work itself, such as long holidays, level of pay, and status. (p. 117)

The question to ask is, “Are these motivations sustained by mid-career teachers?” In their longitudinal study of teachers in the United Kingdom, Day and Gu (2010) found in fact that 76% of teachers in professional life phase 8–15 years teaching experience maintained a positive outlook and “remained highly committed and motivated” (p. 86).

Using the three domains outlined by Kyriacou and Coulthard (2000) as a framework, the Delphi study results confirm that in the NSW DEC, mid-career teachers have also maintained high levels of motivation. The sixteen key motivators arrived at through consensus (Tables 1 and 2), are mainly altruistic and intrinsic with only three statements judged to be extrinsic motivators.

It is clear that even in mid-career, the leading reasons teachers remain motivated are altruistic reasons. In the professional motivations category, *the desire to make a difference through the delivery of quality teaching and learning experiences for all students* was rated very highly both in terms of the percentage of participants (94%) who ranked it in the top half of their list and in terms of its average rank (1.69). This was mirrored in the personal motivations category where *having a love of children and their learning achievements* also had a 94% agreement in terms of the percentage of participants who ranked it in the top half

of their list. Under professional motivations, *the belief that teaching is a worthwhile profession whereby they [mid-career teachers] can make a positive contribution to society*, was also highly ranked (75 %).

As well as altruistic reasons, this Delphi study provides empirical evidence that mid-career teachers remain strongly motivated for a variety of intrinsic reasons. A strong motivator was *the ability to influence best teaching practice* and common to both motivation categories was *a sense of satisfaction and achievement* in their work. *Quality programs and resources* were also seen to be important. Other motivators spanning both categories included developing *positive relationships* and *professional development opportunities*.

Powerful extrinsic motivators were *job security* and *maintaining a healthy work/life balance*. This is not surprising as it is known from literature that mid-career is a time when a greater focus is of necessity, often afforded to family and lifestyle concerns (Williams and Fox, 1995; OECD, 2005; Day and Qing, 2007). In an age of growing economic uncertainty, job security is an important factor in teacher wellbeing. Having *supportive Principals and professional executive teams* are important and can have a significant impact on teacher wellbeing, especially at this critical career point.

TABLE 1: PROFESSIONAL MOTIVATIONS

| Professional Motivations | Mean rank | Percentage of participants ranking statement in top half of ranks |
|--|-----------|---|
| A desire to make a difference through the delivery of quality teaching and learning experiences for all students | 1.69 | 94% |
| Belief that teaching is a worthwhile profession whereby they can make a positive contribution to society | 3.00 | 75% |
| Developing collegial relationships to both learn from and support the learning of their colleagues | 4.10 | 50% |
| Ability to influence best teaching practice | 4.13 | 63% |
| A sense of satisfaction from their achievements in their work | 4.31 | 63% |
| Supportive Principals and professional executive teams | 4.50 | 56% |

| | | |
|---|------|-----|
| A commitment to life long learning through professional development opportunities to enhance knowledge practice | 4.56 | 38% |
| Quality programs and resources | 4.81 | 31% |

TABLE 2: PERSONAL MOTIVATIONS

| Personal Motivations | Mean rank | Percentage of participants ranking statement in top half of ranks |
|---|-----------|---|
| Positive relationships with students, staff and community members | 3.94 | 63% |
| A sense of achievement and satisfaction at a job well done | 4.06 | 50% |
| Ability to contribute to education and the school community | 4.25 | 63% |
| The challenge and rewards of ongoing learning | 4.31 | 50% |
| Maintaining a healthy work/life balance | 4.38 | 44% |
| A love of children and their learning achievements | 4.44 | 94% |
| Opportunity to work in areas of personal interest and expertise | 4.50 | 44% |
| Job security | 4.56 | 44% |

Concerns of mid-career teachers

In contrast to motivations, the sixteen key concerns arrived at through consensus and shown in Tables 3 and 4, fall within the extrinsic and intrinsic domains only. It is clear that by mid-career, the leading concerns teachers have are of an extrinsic nature as they relate to external factors “which are not inherent in the work itself” (Kyriacou and Coulthard, 2000, p. 117) . In both the professional and personal concerns categories, *increasing workload and related accountability* was rated highly both in terms of the percentage of participants (81% and 75%) who ranked it in the top half of their list and in terms of its average rank (2.38 and 3.31). *A growing lack of respect / poor perception [of teachers] and recognition within the community* was clearly seen as both a professional and personal concern with 69% and 63% of participants ranking it in the top half of their lists respectively.

The theme of change, *the pace of educational change, lack of effective support for change and staff resistance to change*, was identified as being a compelling extrinsic concern.

Developing from the early work of Fuller's concerns-based approach to teacher development (Fuller, 1969; Fuller and Brown, 1975; Conway and Clark, 2003) teacher concerns in relation to change and innovation can be classified into three types of concerns: self-concerns; task/situation concerns; and impact concerns (Van den Berg, 2002; Conway and Clark, 2003). Failure to recognise and address these teacher concerns during periods of change and innovation can slow the implementation process as well as impact negatively on teacher confidence and feelings of competence in implementing change (Van den Berg, 2002). Other sources of concerns of an extrinsic nature centre on relationships including those with teaching colleagues, school leaders and parents.

A major concern arising from mid-career teachers' work was related to time, both *the lack of time for preparation and teaching* and *effective time management* with 81% and 50% of participants ranking it in the top half of their lists respectively. This is closely connected to the theme of work/life balance where mid-career teachers are faced with an increasing need to balance *the demands of work and family life* which rated highly both in terms of the percentage of participants (69%) who ranked it in the top half of their list and in terms of its average rank (3.18).

As might be expected, another important concern of an intrinsic nature is related to students themselves and mid-career teachers' ability to deliver quality outcomes for all students. Their ability *to cater for and meet the needs of the diverse range of students in their care* was of prime importance with 44% and 69% of participants ranking it in the top half of their lists respectively. Another intrinsic concern, *feelings of burnout due to the demands of the job*, is clearly related to the intensification of the teaching profession and "the manner in which teachers experience their professional situation, cognitively and affectively" (Van den Berg, 2002). This and many of the other concerns highlighted above, have implications for school leaders which will be discussed the following section.

TABLE 3: PROFESSIONAL CONCERNS

| Professional Concerns | Mean rank | Percentage of participants ranking statement in top half of ranks |
|---|------------------|--|
| An ever-increasing workload and related accountability | 2.38 | 81% |
| The lack of time for preparation and teaching | 3.06 | 81% |
| A growing lack of respect and professional recognition within the community | 3.75 | 69% |
| Feelings of burnout due to the demands of the job | 4.25 | 50% |
| The pace of educational change, lack of effective support for change and staff resistance to change | 4.25 | 56% |
| The need to cater for the diverse range of students while delivering quality outcomes for students | 4.88 | 44% |
| Issues of the “crowded” curriculum and the introduction of the new national curriculum | 5.00 | 31% |
| The-increasing expectations of teachers from parents and the community | 5.25 | 38% |

TABLE 4: PERSONAL CONCERNS

| Personal Concerns | Mean rank | Percentage of participants ranking statement in top half of ranks |
|---|------------------|--|
| Managing the demands of work and family life | 3.18 | 69% |
| Increasing workload pressure and related accountabilities | 3.31 | 75% |
| Their ability to meet the needs of the diverse range of students in their care | 3.44 | 69% |
| Poor perception of the teaching profession in the general community | 3.69 | 63% |
| Dealing with criticism and abuse from some parents | 4.06 | 50% |
| Effective time management | 4.63 | 50% |
| Inconsistent expectations from school leaders | 4.75 | 50% |
| Constraints of working conditions and lack of remuneration for extra skill and training | 5.56 | 19% |

Discussion and Implications for Leadership

This Delphi study has shown that first and foremost, mid-career teachers remain motivated for largely altruistic reasons. Like pre-service and beginning teachers (OECD, 2005; Day et al., 2007; Pop and Turner, 2009), mid-career teachers maintain a strong sense of vocation, which is not diminished with experience over time. Combined with motivators of an intrinsic nature most participants in the study indicated that mid-career teachers have a desire to do the very

best for students. One commented: *Mid-career teachers pride themselves on being expert at classroom delivery, at student welfare and at creating the best learning opportunities for their students.* In contrast, the concerns of mid-career teachers arose from both extrinsic and intrinsic issues. However the relative importance of the motivations and concerns expressed by the Delphi study participants vary considerably. It can be concluded that the individual context is the differentiating factor and this has implications for school leaders and their organisations. This inference is supported by the VITAE research project which found that generally, it is the combination of key influences from an individual's personal, situated and professional domains that affect their sense of effectiveness (Day et al., 2007).

School leaders have the responsibility to create conditions that will sustain and support teacher motivation and address issues of concern. Rather than address each concern in isolation, a holistic solution needs to be employed. Dinham (2007) show that there are no 'quick fix' solutions to problems but research has shown that by envisioning and developing schools as learning organisations/communities positive outcomes can be achieved (Voulalas and Sharpe, 2005). Learning communities are characterised by generative learning (Senge, 1990) and although much has been written about learning communities (Dinham, 2007; OECD, 2010), of importance is "the role of the principal in the transformational process [which] appears to be critical" (Voulalas and Sharpe, 2005, p. 188). School and organisational leaders are ideally placed to address and manage extrinsic concerns and set up favourable conditions to deal with concerns arising from both external and internal sources.

Many of the concerns of mid-career teachers identified by this Delphi study are interrelated and arise from ongoing change in education. In their research on the intensification of teachers' work, Ballet and Kelchtermans (Ballet and Kelchtermans, 2008; Ballet and Kelchtermans, 2009) built on the earlier work of Apple (Apple, 1986) to show that intensification came not only from outside the school, but also from the teachers themselves who maintained self-imposed standards to ensure the quality of their teaching was not

compromised (Ballet and Kelchtermans, 2008). They developed “contingent pragmatism” (Moore et al., 2002, p. 554), whereby they compromise and implement required innovations without replacing existing practices, thus adding to their own workload. Consequently, intensification impacts on work/life balance, which was revealed as a concern in this study.

In their review of literature conceptualising work/life balance, Kalliath and Brough (2008) identified two main aspects contributing to our understanding. The first was the concept of ‘good balance’ and the second was recognition that work/life balance is not static but changes over time and is specific to the individual. Synthesising these ideas, they define work/life balance as “the individual perception that work and non-work activities are compatible and promote growth in accordance with an individual’s current life-priorities” (Kalliath and Brough, 2008, p. 326). Different factors are perceived with varying degrees of importance at different career stages (Darcy et al., 2012), although this is often intensified for mid-career teachers who deal with both demanding professional work and growing family commitments (Day and Gu, 2010). The effort to achieve the right balance may be intensified by an individual’s chosen priorities to either focus on non-work activities or professional activities to enhance career progression or feelings of satisfaction. The willingness of school leaders to support the career aspirations of mid-career teachers by providing authentic leadership opportunities or relevant professional learning at critical career points cannot be underestimated. Recognising and respecting a mid-career teachers’ decision to put leadership aspirations on hold and re-focus mainly on their teaching role can be equally supportive. Paying closer attention to the needs of teachers at different career stages should result in greater productivity over time (Darcy et al., 2012). In this way intensification can be mediated by school leaders through their inter-personal relationships, their organisational processes and by creating a positive school culture.

Hallmarks of such transformational leadership include a clearly articulated, shared vision with staff as active participants in decision-making, which promotes a sense of trust

and collaboration (Voulalas and Sharpe, 2005; Ballet and Kelchtermans, 2008). Constructive support through the provision of time for effective collaboration and teacher professional development, as well as the opportunity to solve problems and reflect on the implementation of initiatives throughout the process, is essential. Always keeping the focus on teaching and learning, providing opportunities for teacher leadership, collegial partnerships and the recognition of quality teachers and their teaching all contribute to the achievement of a positive school culture (Dinham, 2007).

Conclusions

This Delphi study has provided an insight into the motivations and concerns of mid-career teachers in an Australian context. It has revealed that mid-career teachers are highly professional and remain motivated over time. They have a strong sense of vocation and the delivery of quality outcomes for students is still their primary motivator. Their main concerns are issues that impact on the achievement of good teaching and optimal outcomes for students. School leaders play a pivotal role in providing an environment that supports teachers in their professional work. In so doing, they need to recognise teachers as individuals whose career paths are not linear and for whom different strategies will be relevant at different points in their careers. Further in-depth case study research is currently being undertaken to develop a rich picture of mid-career teachers in the NSW DEC. An investment in such knowledge creation is an investment in future sustainability of the profession.

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