

**“I’m tentatively teaching”:
Crossing the border from student of teaching to teacher of students.**

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ABSTRACT

The majority of newly qualified teachers in New South Wales, Australia, begin their careers as casual teachers in fragmented employment contexts which make it difficult to build on the knowledge base gained at university through continuous, and continuously evaluated, practice in a classroom. This study explored the experiences of early career casual teachers and investigated the effect of fragmented employment contexts on the process of developing professional knowledge and practical competence in the first two years of teaching. The study employed a mixed methods research design utilising a collective case study together with a postal survey-questionnaire to gather both qualitative and quantitative data. Results indicated that the process of learning to teach in contexts typified by multiple schools, multiple classrooms, multiple communities and with multiple students exacerbated the problems encountered by all beginning teachers and provided few mechanisms by which casual teachers were able to resolve them to their own professional satisfaction.

Introduction

In New South Wales (NSW), Australia, the present oversupply of primary teachers has led to an apparent acceptance by stakeholders such as schools, universities and at least one employing authority, the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET), that beginning to teach as a “casual” teacher is an appropriate way to launch a teaching career. The DET, which coordinates public education for 730,000 students and 80,000 teachers across the state and is responsible for the employment of the majority of beginning teachers, describes casual teaching as

a great way to gain an introduction to the NSW public education system...
For teachers awaiting permanent appointment, casual and temporary employment provides great opportunities to further develop professional skills

(<https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/employment/recruit/casualteachers/about.htm>).

Despite this positive view of casual teaching propounded by the Department, the research on which this paper is based suggests strongly that casual teaching is an inappropriate way in which to launch a teaching career. The experiences of newly qualified teachers who participated in this study are at odds with the DET's proposal that casual teaching "provides valuable experience for teachers just starting out as well as those seeking variety and new experiences in their careers." While casual teaching may indeed provide flexible career options for experienced teachers, it is nevertheless a less than optimal means by which newly qualified teachers can build on the knowledge and professional practical skills attained in initial teacher education to develop competency as a teacher.

Research context

In much of the research of the last two decades into the induction of beginning teachers into the profession there is an assumption that beginning teachers are those who work in their own classrooms in schools where they have security of tenure and thereby an accepted position as a member of both the staff of the school and of the profession itself (Bullough, 1989, 1997; Bullough, Knowles, & Crow, 1992; Calderhead, 1988). Beginning teachers are positioned as those who are able to participate in the community of a school, access formal and informal supports offered by colleagues, and continue their professional learning through participation in induction and mentoring programs, in professional development opportunities, and in reflection in and on their own practice. In NSW, in contrast to the above descriptions of beginning teachers drawn from the American and British literature, most beginning teachers commence their careers as casual teachers and many wait several years before appointment to a school and a class of their own (Pietsch & Williamson, 2004, 2005).

Beginning teachers are also positioned most commonly as those who, in commencing careers, do so under conditions of "survival", experiencing "reality shock" (Huberman, 1989, p. 31) as they learn to manage the multiple and complex realities of the classroom. In NSW, beginning teachers whether in permanent or casual teaching positions, report experiencing this "reality shock". However, for those in casual teaching positions, the capacity to move beyond the initial focus on survival is limited, and under conditions of constant change of schools, classrooms and students, many beginning teachers are left disillusioned as they struggle to manage in casual teaching situations where much of what they have learned cannot be practised and some is simply lost.

Research aim and questions

This paper suggests that learning to teach is embodied in a developmental process of integrating and applying personal practical knowledge of teaching, knowledge of schools, school systems and the profession, and knowledge of self as teacher. The focus of this study is primarily on the experiences of early career teachers who spent their first two years of teaching in casual teaching positions and it considers the ways in which these teachers were able to develop their understanding, integration and application of these three domains of knowledge in the "real world" of schools and classrooms.

This paper is based on a study conducted in 2003-4 with participants who commenced work as primary school teachers at the start of 2003 (Pietsch & Williamson, 2004, 2005, 2007, 2008). The study explored the different ways in which teachers in a range of employment situations were able to expand their professional knowledge base

(Grossman, 1990, 1995; Turner-Bisset, 1999), and aimed to describe and analyse the effect on beginning teachers' learning of differentiated initial employment experience. Employment contexts varied from the extreme fragmentation of day-to-day casual (supply) teaching to the consistency and continuity of permanency as a classroom teacher belonging to the community of one school. Differences in employment experience provided differentiated access to the processes of personal practical knowledge acquisition (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Elbaz, 1983), differentiated participation in professional socialisation (Lortie, 1975; Nias, 1986; Wenger, 1998) and differentiation in the capacity of teachers to negotiate personal professional identity (McNally, 2005; Sachs, 2001). In investigating the above issues, the study addressed three research questions pertaining to the differences arising as a result of variation in initial employment experience. These were: (1) What changes in teacher knowledge occurred in the first two years of teaching? (2) How did these changes in knowledge come about? (3) Why did differences in knowledge emerge?

Analytical framework

The knowledge base of teaching

The study is based on a conception of the knowledge base of teaching that integrates the knowledge constructed by the practising teacher from three interrelated and interactive processes. These processes are the acquisition of personal practical knowledge of teaching through consistent attention to and responsibility for class-based teaching; participation in professional socialisation which allows teachers to draw on the support provided by schools and systems to enhance knowledge, understanding and practice of teaching; and negotiation of professional identity which enables new teachers to weather the initial "reality shock" and move to consolidate a professional identity which sustains their continued developmental participation in the profession. The task of the beginning teacher is conceptualised as that of expanding the personal knowledge base through an iterative process of integration of practical knowledge with knowledge of the context of school, school systems and the profession, and with knowledge of self-as-teacher wherein vocation can be consolidated by the interaction of both extension of practical knowledge and acceptance by the self and others of the role of teacher.

Methodology

In addressing the research aims and questions, a mixed methods research design was employed. A collective case study was used as the primary means of data gathering. The progress of seven beginning teachers was reviewed through a focus group interview at the end of the last year of initial teacher education, followed by a series of three individual, semi-structured interviews per participant over the following two years. In these interviews, the question-response format was complemented by classroom observation, stimulated recall from a photographic record of classroom events, document and artefact analysis and participant completion of graphic organisers. Case study data was complemented by numerical and non-numerical data obtained from a postal survey-questionnaire.

Participants

Case study participants

The participants in the case study were a group of seven self-selected teachers who had graduated as primary teachers from the same regional university. Their pre-service knowledge base had been informed by participation in similar courses of instruction and their practicum periods had been spent in schools in the same geographic area, that is, in schools surrounding a major regional centre. Their employment experiences in the year following graduation were significantly different and the variations were to result in markedly different applications of the knowledge gained at university. These differences resulted not only in different levels of gain in personal practical knowledge, but also in significantly different levels of participation in professional socialisation, and very different conceptions of self-as-teacher.

Case study participants included two male and five female teachers. Four teachers were career-change entrants to teaching and three were school leavers. At the beginning of the first year of teaching, only one participant, Alison, had received a permanent appointment and this was to a school in a neighbouring state, requiring her to adjust to different school and system organisation and different curriculum and pedagogical requirements. One participant, Evan, had begun work in a year-long temporary position and the remaining five were in casual positions of varying duration. In the course of the first year one further teacher, Cate, received a full-time position, commencing in the second term of the year.

Survey respondents

The survey-questionnaire, sent to 399 beginning teachers through a series of gateways involving senior DET personnel and school principals, was returned by 241 teachers at the end of the first year, a response rate of 62 per cent. At this time (that is, by the end of the first year as professional teachers), 61 per cent of respondents were in non-permanent teaching positions.

Data collection and analysis

Non-numerical interview data were organised and analysed using N Vivo 1.3. Within-case and across-case analyses of case study data by means of constant comparison of emergent constructs were used to examine the tentative constructs which had initially arisen from the relevant literature and were reflected in the research questions. Data collection and iterative data analysis were interwoven throughout the study, with analysis informing subsequent collection of data. As analysis of the qualitative data proceeded, the confirmation of anticipated key constructs and emergence of new ones provided a basis on which the survey-questionnaire was formulated to further test the validity of the constructs across a broader population of beginning teachers. The postal survey-questionnaire was piloted with a convenience sample of ten early career teachers and then sent to schools for distribution to identified beginning teachers. Numerical data were organised and analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) while non-numerical data obtained from open-ended items were organised, coded and analysed using Excel. Analysis of quantitative data using univariate and bivariate statistical procedures was undertaken in order to identify statistically significant correlations and differences arising as a result of differences in employment contexts. Ongoing coding

and re-coding of qualitative data, aligned with statistical analysis of survey-questionnaire data, enabled constant comparative analysis within and across cases and across data sets and the emergence of similarities and differences in results obtained from each data gathering method.

Results

Difficulties of casual teaching

The literature on casual teaching is surprisingly sparse. However, there is general agreement that this form of teaching is fraught with difficulties and disadvantages (McCormack & Thomas, 2002; Tromans, 2002; Webb, 1992; Young, Ansara, & Brooks, 1999). These include poor levels of recognition by schools and school staffs, inferior levels of remuneration, poor relationships with students, inability to follow through or evaluate the results of teaching, loss of skills in programming and planning, lack of experience in relating to parents, and poor status within the hierarchy of schools and the profession. Most research does not distinguish between casual teachers who are experienced and, for a range of usually personal reasons, have elected this form of teaching, and those who are beginners and forced to learn to teach through this form of employment because of the exigencies of the imbalance between supply and demand within the teaching workforce. Given the range of difficulties detailed in the literature as experienced by teachers who are both qualified and experienced, it may be hypothesised that the level of difficulty would be considerably increased when met by those with no prior experience of classroom teaching. Participants in this study confirmed this hypothesis.

During the final weeks of initial teacher education, Alison, a permanent teacher, described the status of a casual teacher from her observations during her recent internship.

you could be anybody...you're just this warm body that comes in...and having seen the different ways that teachers in schools treat casual teachers...your status as a casual teacher, even if you're there on a long term block, I think you're very much the next peg down (Alison, preliminary focus group interview).

Her views were echoed by Bianca, a teacher who remained in casual employment throughout her first two years. She identified one of the key problems with casual teaching as that of not knowing the students she would be teaching:

...this could be me...I don't know what class I'm going to be walking into whether they're children that are at this level or that level and I've got something pitched at this level or that level, and that scares me. Walking in, you don't know these children, what capabilities they have. (Bianca, preliminary focus group interview).

Casual teaching was also characterised as a time of personal, professional and financial uncertainty and considerable professional frustration and dissatisfaction. Casual teachers experienced ongoing uncertainty about current and future employment; frustration about the need for frequent adjustment to the physical, administrative, interpersonal and

pedagogical characteristics of a variety of schools and classrooms; and dissatisfaction with their limited responsibility for programming, planning, teaching and learning.

The most difficult aspect of having blocks is not being able to consolidate learning and the unsettled feeling that comes from not knowing where to, and what will be expected, next (Survey Respondent [SR] 350701; casual teacher).

At the moment, employment security is a nightmare (SR 380101; casual teacher).

Casual teaching was seen by participants in both the survey and the case study as a means to survival while they waited for elusive permanent positions.

How much longer do I have to wait? If I don't get a full-time position I may have to find something else to gain financial security even though I really love teaching (SR 381004; casual teacher)

Teachers were forthcoming about the negative aspects of casual employment: there appeared to be no recognition of the DET's more positive view of casual teaching as a means to the development of professional skills.

Acquisition of personal practical knowledge

Defining personal practical knowledge

The specific indicators of personal practical knowledge, which researchers characterise variously as general pedagogical knowledge, personal practical knowledge or pedagogical content knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; Elbaz, 1983; Grossman, 1995; Shulman, 1986; Turner-Bisset, 1999) comprise a teacher's knowledge, beliefs and skills about teachers and teaching, curriculum, students, learners and learning, general principles of instruction and classroom management and the capacity of teachers to move beyond knowing about teaching to knowing how to integrate these aspects of knowledge in the act of teaching. Teachers' perceptions of their learning in this domain were represented in the interview schedule and survey by a number of items which explored respondents' attitudes to their own growth in knowledge about performance of some of the key tasks of classroom teaching, namely planning and programming, relating to students, and catering to students with special needs.

Quantitative data analysis

Analysis of survey data was related to the effects on teacher knowledge gain of working in differentiated employment contexts. These contexts were described in terms of three particular characteristics of casual and permanent teaching: level of security of employment (status), the number of schools in which a teacher had taught (schools), and whether or not a teacher had responsibility for a single class (class-based).

Factor analysis of the survey data revealed three key aspects related to personal practical knowledge: knowledge of planning, programming and syllabus; knowledge of inclusive teaching for students with special needs; and capacity to develop effective teacher-student relationships through competent behaviour management strategies. Data were

analysed to assess any significant differences between those who were employed as permanent teachers and those employed as casual teachers on each of these three items.

Survey participants' responses indicated that there were no statistically significant differences between those who were casual and those who were permanent in terms of self-perceived knowledge gain in any of these aspects of practical knowledge; both casual and permanent teachers were able to identify some gains in knowledge. This supported the findings of the case study in which both casual and permanent teachers were able to identify some knowledge gains in the course of the first year. However, further investigation revealed levels of significant difference in the difficulties reported by respondents in different employment situations. Mann-Whitney tests for differences revealed that employment context resulted in some statistically significant differences in relation to assessing learning ($p < .05$), compiling student reports ($p < .001$), in knowing students ($p < .01$), in developing positive relationships with students ($p < .01$) and in relating to parents ($p < .05$), in all of which casual teachers reported greater difficulty.

Despite acknowledgement by case study and survey respondents alike that they had made gains in practical knowledge in their first year, it was also the area of knowledge which accounted for most concern about ongoing professional learning. In response to an open-ended question about areas for further learning in the second year of teaching, 82 per cent of survey responses related to the acquisition of personal practical knowledge. Knowledge and skills in programming, catering for students with special needs and managing student behaviour were identified by survey respondents as major areas for improvement in their second year of teaching.

Qualitative data analysis

The difficulties reported by surveyed casual teachers in learning to teach were identified in more detail by case study participants. Within the scope of a perception of overall knowledge gain, all case study participants, whether permanent or casual teachers, identified similar difficulties in their first term with programming, assessing and reporting, managing student behaviour and learning to relate to parents. Permanent and long-term temporary teachers were able to recognise difficulties and adjust teaching strategies with some success by the end of the first semester. Casual teachers, on the other hand, were faced with ongoing and persistent difficulties throughout the first year. They were generally unable to resolve issues of behaviour management, and became increasingly aware of the lack of opportunity to consolidate the remaining skills, particularly those of programming and planning, assessing and reporting student learning, and evaluating teaching.

Planning and programming. In the first semester of teaching, all case study teachers focused on preparing plans and programs for their teaching whether for a day's or a term's teaching. While the three teachers in permanent and temporary positions were able to come to terms to some extent with a task they found difficult and for which they felt singularly unprepared, casual teachers found that very few of the programming skills they had acquired were called upon in casual teaching. While colleagues in long-term, class-based positions in one school were able to evaluate their own programming in terms of the success or otherwise of teaching, and later (that is, by the second semester of continuous teaching) of student learning, there was little opportunity for those in casual teaching positions to evaluate any substantial outcome from either their planning or their

teaching. Casual teaching was in fact seen as a “day lost for your kids and your program” (Alison, Initial interview).

Assessing and reporting. Casual teachers had little responsibility for assessment of student learning or for reporting, and the growing realisation that they were not required to do more than keep students “busy,” was seen by all of them to be a travesty of their ideas and ideals of teaching. Cate, a casual teacher during her final year at university, described this expectation as “going against the grain:”

You want to do a really good job but you can't...because the fact is that you don't know where that class is up to. Most of the time the programs aren't there – the teacher's program – they might have left some stuff for you for the day but you don't know why the kids are doing page 35 in their handwriting book... (Cate, preliminary focus group interview).

Evaluation of practice. There was little opportunity for the reflection-on-action which characterised the response of permanent teachers to classroom events. Cate reflected on the lack of continuity in casual teaching and its effect on her own practice:

Well, I'll just get in there and do what I can and that's it and not think about it afterwards, which I think's really bad practice for the future because I don't want to get in the routine of not caring enough...I'm not looking back at what I've done because there's no point, because you can't go in the next day and, you know, do anything like that. (Cate, preliminary focus group interview).

Her views were equally the concern of survey respondents:

I sometimes think that I could be doing ANYTHING in the classroom and no-one would know/care. It's lucky that I am very self-motivated and driven, so I learn and ask etc, but it's usually from other teachers, not supervisors /executives. (SR 380302; casual teacher).

Behaviour management. Casual teachers were intensely aware that relationships between casual teachers and students were often characterised by lack of student respect and ongoing behavioural difficulties. Dianne, a casual teacher for the duration of her first year, identified management of student behaviour as a significant contributor to her decision at the end of the year to leave teaching.

...you don't know the children very well and they have little or no respect for you because they know either you're not going to be there the next day, or even if you are there the next day, maybe they'll be able to get away with whatever it is that they're doing (Dianne, Initial interview).

Bianca identified a similar issue: ‘being a casual, I think behaviour management is what you deal with all day’ (Second interview).

The process of acquisition of personal practical knowledge was made more difficult for casual teachers as they were unable to access the resources and support available to colleagues who were located in one school. The constant change of schools, of classrooms within schools and, for those in rural and regional areas, often of

geographical location and community, meant that casual teachers were often preoccupied, at times on a daily basis, with the day-to-day issues of finding schools, parking areas, administration personnel, classrooms, keys, staffrooms, schools' and teachers' routines, lesson plans, equipment and resources. These were matters that most long-term teachers addressed with support from colleagues, and to some extent overcame, within the first term at a school. For casual teachers, they were issues which bedevilled every teaching day.

Participation in professional socialisation

Participation in the life of a school was a recognised part of becoming a professional in a school. Data from the survey revealed that there were statistically significant differences between teachers in secure employment and those in fragmented contexts in their opportunity to participate in extra-classroom activities. Results indicated differences in opportunity to take responsibility for extra-classroom programs ($p < .001$), to liaise with specialist personnel ($p < .01$), to take part in school committees ($p < .001$), and to exercise leadership skills ($p < .01$). In addition, teachers in fragmented employment experienced difficulty in accessing support, and again, there were significant differences in the support available. Teachers in fragmented contexts reported difficulties in accessing any form of professional learning ($p < .001$).

Permanent and long-term temporary case study participants had opportunity to move out cautiously into the wider programs of the school and all were able to contribute in some way by the end of the year to sporting, technology or student welfare programs or to whole school activities. In doing so, they were able to observe more experienced colleagues at work, participate in professional conversations, take the opportunity to extend their practice and its evaluation into school settings other than their classroom, and share resources with others. Casual teachers, on the other hand, found it difficult to participate with any degree of confidence in the work of a school community outside their nominated classroom and generally were not invited to do so.

Case study participants were intensely aware of the expectations placed on them by other teachers and although initially wary of revealing their level of inexperience, were gradually able to open up in the presence of other staff members and seek assistance when required. They were aware of the need to participate actively in the life of the school as well as the opportunity that school membership provided of gaining support for their own professional learning. Casual teachers, dependent on schools' positive perceptions of their competence for future employment, rarely sought support or admitted any need of help.

Schools as providers of support

The provision of support through induction programs or formalised mentoring programs within schools was by no means a foregone conclusion for either permanent or casual teachers. However, permanent teachers did have opportunity for informal mentoring and for participating in collegial activities which enhanced their position in the school and their wider access to support. Survey respondents' experiences represented both extremes of support:

Without a fantastic and supportive school staff as I am in currently, the decision to leave would be very easy for me (SR 300303; permanent teacher).

By contrast, other permanent teachers received minimal support:

1st term was very tough. I wish I did it differently. No one helped, they just left me alone. I have never needed more help and guidance, and they weren't there. With my knowledge of the school now, I should have asked but I would have got it judgingly. (SR 301202; permanent teacher).

Permanent teachers and those with long-term temporary positions were mostly encouraged to attend professional development programs associated with their formalised induction programs. Casual teachers reported no access to professional development. Formal support mechanisms (induction programs, professional development, supervision and mentoring) and opportunities to seek informal support through interaction with colleagues in meetings, staff room conversation and joint activities were often very limited or were unavailable to casual teachers and most casual teachers reported little support from other teachers and from school executive staff.

Although I am enjoying myself as a teacher I think it is difficult as a casual as you are not guaranteed work or sick pay and job security is nil. It can also be difficult when you are at a different school each day and don't get the chance to develop relationships with staff or students (SR 270501; casual teacher).

However, there were exceptions:

At the school I am at I had a teacher mentor. I do not think I would have made it through the year without her. She helped me with programming & everything about teaching & the community I work in. (SR 090304; casual teacher).

When discussing the level of support provided to her as a casual teacher, Dianne remarked:

...just even down to things like whether people can be bothered speaking to you...some staff at schools are really good and couldn't do enough for you and will help you out, and some other people won't; even won't speak to you, won't want to tell you...where their ...you know, stupid things like where their boundaries are for their playground (Dianne, initial interview).

Bianca described similar resistance by school staff to engaging with her, even on an informal basis:

I really felt like I was on the outer circle, like, I don't think anyone spoke to me and I felt really, really...I don't know, I felt like I was a leper or something... (Bianca, third interview).

By contrast, Evan, a long-term, class-based, though temporary, teacher provided with a mentor and formal professional learning time by his school, described the support he had received, not only from his mentor, but from others on the staff as encouraging him to try new things in his classroom.

...but the things I've tried here, people have been supportive of and supported, you know...given you any advice or help that you need... (Evan, third interview).

Negotiation of professional identity

The negotiation of professional identity is a key task for beginning teachers as they enter their first schools and classrooms and begin to relate to students as “theirs” (Beijaard, Verloop, & Vermunt, 2000; Boreham, Gray, & Blake, 2006). Beginning teachers, whether permanent or casual and whether survey respondents or case study participants came to teaching with well-articulated personal ideas and ideals of teaching often expressed in terms of a life-long intention to be a teacher, a belief in the value of teaching, or a commitment to “making a difference” either to children or to society in general. As casual teachers found their experience to be less and less in accord with their intentions or their values, self-efficacy faded, and with it (albeit with great reluctance) went commitment to the profession of teaching itself.

Permanent teachers, on the other hand, were confirmed in their commitment to the profession and in their commitment to classroom practice in their schools. The three case study participants who ended the year with permanent appointments (Alison, Evan and Cate) had all initially expressed a desire to be out of the classroom within five years either in an alternative teaching-related field or in another industry. All three confirmed their intention to stay in teaching as they prepared for their second year of teaching and as they planned and programmed for their new class of students.

Professional identity and teacher retention

The presence or absence of support, access to professional learning, and the consequent development of teaching skills contributed to a significant dichotomy in the level of commitment which teachers showed by the end of the first year to the profession itself. The identity of permanent teachers became stronger, as competence developed and as confidence in their capacity to teach was evident; that of casual teachers weakened as the lack of “real” teaching opportunity led to a belief that they were not in fact “real” teachers, but rather were simply babysitters of other teachers’ children.

I found day to day casual teaching very stressful. Students have no respect, which cause a lot of inappropriate behaviour in the classroom. This gave me doubts as to my success as a teacher. (SR260301; casual teacher)

The strengthening or weakening of professional identity was directly related to whether or not teachers chose to remain in the service of the DET. Although ninety-five per cent of survey respondents identified as their first preference for their second year of teaching, a permanent position with a class of their own, and as their second preference, a long-term position with their own class there were still doubts as to the feasibility of maintaining a career as a casual teacher.

Although I love my job I'm not sure whether I will be staying in the profession for long, as I don't think I can survive from day-to-day casual work while I wait and the department finds me a permanent position. This is the only downfall of this profession (SR380301; casual teacher).

Of the seven case study participants, one (Evan) was confirmed in a permanent position at the school where he had worked with considerable support for his first year as a temporary teacher; Alison and Cate remained at schools where they had permanent appointments. Of the remaining four teachers, two were moving overseas for the following year, not necessarily into teaching, and two remained as casual teachers but were looking as well for other work to sustain them financially if teaching was not regularly available.

Conclusion

The employment context in which beginning teachers first begin to teach is central to development of their knowledge base. Early development of competency necessitated a stable, supportive, school-based and class-based context in the first two years of teaching in order to reach a level of competency beyond that of the novice (Berliner, 1995, 2001). Teachers who were placed in permanent, class-based positions during their first year (a minority of teachers) experienced growth in professional knowledge and were able to consolidate case knowledge during their second year. Those who belonged to no one school and who had no class to call their own, made little or no progress in their first year of teaching and the loss of confidence which was associated with perceived lessening of skills and knowledge was reflected in fragile professional identities and lowered commitment to continue in teaching.

This research expands extant models of beginning teaching by demonstrating the interactive, iterative and inter-dependent nature of the relationship between employment context, socialisation, identity formation and knowledge expansion. It also provides a base for those engaged in preparing, recruiting and developing teachers to re-think policy and practice on the place of the initial employment experience in the career development of beginning teachers. This research suggests that perceptions of initial teacher education need to extend beyond the initial four years provided by tertiary education institutions and include at least the initial year in schools, an understanding that now prevails in Scotland. (Boreham et al., 2006). It also suggests that there are implications for consideration by schools and systems of the content and process of induction and professional learning programs to ensure that those responsible for the induction of teachers respond to the level of competence attained by teachers rather than to the number of years since graduation. There may also be scope for a re-consideration of the recognition of the specific needs of beginning casual teachers in schools and opportunity in tertiary institutions and in schools to explore more satisfactory delineations of career progression and career development for early career teachers.

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