



FACT SHEET

Week beginning 22 October 2007

Education and Schools

So who is entering the teaching profession in 2007?

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Introduction: Welcome to Learning Works, I'm Tony Ryan. So what do we know about those new teachers who are now entering our schools in 2007? As World Teachers Day this year falls on Friday 26 October, it is a good time to reflect on the background and experience of those who are now choosing to enter the profession.

Our commentator today, Wendy Teasdale Smith, Principal over the past four years of Aberfoyle Park High School in Adelaide has carried out research on new entrants to the teaching profession. Wendy has had a long involvement in professional associations of educators, both at state and national level. The national winner of the prestigious Principals Award for National Awards in 2004 for Quality Schooling in Australia, she was vice president for six years of the South Australian Secondary Principals Association, and national deputy president of the Australian Secondary Principals Association. And in November 2007, she will take over as President of the South Australian Branch of the Australian College of Educators. Wendy Teasdale Smith.

As this is World Teachers Day, I think it is a great time to talk about today's new teachers and to consider what they bring to the profession. Are they similar to those who started working in classrooms around Australia 20 years ago? Or are they different.

Research I undertook, earlier this year, on behalf of the joint Principals Associations into the experiences of teachers in the first three years of their jobs, has uncovered some very interesting information about teachers new to the profession.

To provide you with a bit of background information the survey of these people was undertaken online. With teachers from across the Catholic, Independent and state school systems being invited to participate in. Over 1300 teachers did so.

For a moment I would like those listening to think about what a teacher new to the profession looks like. What is the image you have in your mind? Is it someone young? Straight from university - still wearing their student garb? Perhaps it is someone with a slightly nervous smile – with just a hint of naivety apparent around the eyes?

Well, I have some news for you – in many circumstances, this is not the type of person beginning careers as teachers. In fact, they are just as likely to have grey in their hair – if they have hair at all and just possibly the occasional wrinkle.

Information from the Queensland College of Teachers indicates, for example, only half of the people starting teacher preparation courses in 2007 were in their 20s. It seems that in Queensland the average age of their graduates is around 33 years of age. Research undertaken by ACER compliments this data by indicating that according to their research 45 % of the Victorian graduates have had another career prior to teaching.

The research I undertook showed that out of the 1343 respondents, 636, or around 50% of those surveyed said they had other careers prior to teaching. I will read out now a few examples of the diversity of life and career experiences listed by some of the respondents to this research.

- Army, then public service economist, then technical writer,
- Artist and self employed landscape gardener.
- Business, Marketing for Agricultural products and then logistics in mining.
- Dietician, Farmer and Grazier and parent.
- Corporate Bank manager – Relationships managing business clients who borrowed in excess of \$10m
- Technical officer CSIRO – conducting field trials of crops and pastures, measurement and analysis of samples and data. Also horticulturalist in vineyards and nurseries.

In general terms. The most common field related to

- Accountancy, banking or business,
- The next most common was hospitality
- With the third category being retail and finally
- The last category was computing.

In closing one of the other very important and positive points of interest that came out of this research was how did these people find the job of teaching?

One of our questions asked the respondents what their “gut level” reaction was to the job. They could tick several options crossing the spectrum from “love it” to “hate it”. An outstanding 93% of these respondents ticked either loved or liked the job. I think this kind of response says we have the right people in the right job and that job is teaching.

So, in closing, today’s beginning teacher brings many things to the classroom –

- diversity
- wealth of life and career experiences
- and a love of the job.

What else could we ask for – and what a great way to celebrate World Teachers’ Day.

Back Announcement: Wendy Teasdale Smith, Principal of Aberfoyle Park High School in Adelaide presented that commentary on the people who are now choosing to enter the teaching profession. Certainly rather different now from those days when most teachers began their teaching as soon as they left teachers College, often barely into their twenties. World Teachers Day is celebrated in Australia on Friday 26 October. From PBA FM in Adelaide, I’m Tony Ryan.