

# 3rd Conference on Emerging Adulthood

TITLE:

## ***Beginning Teachers' Motivations and Aspirations Through Teacher Education***

ABSTRACT:

Much research has focused on what motivates people to take on a teaching career. An open question remains – how do their motivations and aspirations *change* through their professional education? We sampled secondary teacher education candidates near the end of their qualification ( $N=72$ ) in Melbourne Australia (age:  $M=21.44$ ,  $SD 2.77$ ). Participants rated their responses for “then” (recalling their entry to teacher education) and “now” for a range of items. They answered open-ended questions regarding future plans and aspirations, and their teaching related abilities. Responses revealed significant changes in most perceived motivations and aspirations, with all changes in an *upward* direction. Findings are interpreted in light of the current climate of teacher shortages.

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**A. Introduction to the research question(s)**

Research interest in what motivates people to take on a teaching career has resulted in a steady flow of studies and reports from countries around the globe since the 1960s. Recent research has developed an integrative theoretical framework and measurement instruments for investigating beginning teachers' motivations for the choice of teaching as a career (Richardson & Watt, 2006; Watt & Richardson, in press), and their career engagement and professional development aspirations (Richardson & Watt, 2005; Watt, Richardson, & Tysvaer, in press). An open question remains – how do these motivations and aspirations change through the course of their teacher education?

**B. Description of methods (both quantitative and qualitative methods are encouraged)**

The present study sampled teacher education candidates studying to become secondary school teachers (grades 7-12) near the end of their teaching degree ( $N=72$ : 55 females, representing a 76% response rate) at a major metropolitan university in Melbourne Australia. The mean age was 21.44 (SD 2.77). Participants completed a short survey where they rated their responses for “then” (recalling their entry to teacher education) and “now” for items tapping each of the “FIT-Choice” construct measures (Watt & Richardson, in press). They also answered several open-ended questions regarding their future plans and aspirations, and teaching related abilities for which they had most and least confidence. The *FIT-Choice* scale locates findings from prior studies in teacher education and the general career choice literature within the integrative and comprehensive Eccles et al. Expectancy-Value motivational framework (see Eccles et al., 1983; Eccles, 2005; Eccles & Wigfield, 1995; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000), thereby providing a strong and robust measure to guide investigations into teaching as a career choice. The scale identifies constructs related to self-perceptions of teaching ability, perceptions about the demands and rewards of teaching, as well as intrinsic, personal-, and social- utility values about teaching as a profession. Repeated measures MANOVA examined perceived changes in motivations and aspirations through the course of teacher education, and content analysis of open-ended responses identified emergent themes that we used to illustrate and interpret quantitative responses.

**C. Results**

Responses revealed significant changes in most motivations and aspirations through the course of teacher education, with all changes in an upward direction. That is, motivational influences were perceived to have become more influential over time, and aspirations were higher. There was little evidence for gender differences or influence of previous career experiences. Reassuringly, only 2 participants planned not to teach at all, while interestingly 29 planned to teach in the short-term and then switch to another career (similar to a separate and larger multiple-cohort study by Watt, Richardson, & Tysvaer, in press), and 41 planned to teach for their whole career. 44 had previously seriously considered a different career than teaching, and only 9 had previously pursued another career. Educated themes from the open-ended responses provided case illustrations of motivation and aspiration profiles.

**D. Brief discussion & implications**

Findings are interpreted in light of the current climate of teacher shortages in Australia and many international countries including the United States. Implications are towards teacher education providers and policy makers; in view of both understanding prospective teachers' development through their degree, and succession and career planning based on beginning teachers' entry motivations and aspirations.

## E. References (APA format)

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