

## Application Activity 10 Teacher Education Research

### Teacher Shortage

**Education Week.** "Researcher Skewers Explanations Behind Teacher Shortage"  
<http://www.edweek.org/ew/newstory.cfm?slug=30aera.h21>

- Remember

Research in 94/95 of 50,000 teachers in public and private schools across the country gives hard data on reasons teachers leave the classroom. This data counters the common perception that teacher shortages are due to combination of teacher retirement and increased student population. Also challenges conception of private schools as being better work environments with stronger sense of community. Indicates that putting more effort into keeping teachers longer may be a poor strategy.

Results summary:

- General attrition rate (13.2%) is higher than for other professions (11%)
- Most leave within first five years with an intermediate peak at three years
- Small Private schools have highest rate of attrition (22.8%). And even the overall attrition rate for private schools is higher than for public teachers at poorer schools (15.2%). Overall attrition for public school is 12.4%.
- Primary reason for leaving is personal: public schools=40% private schools=49%
- Secondary reason is job dissatisfaction: urban public schools=23% private schools=34%. Low salary and poor administrative support cited as primary contributing factors to dissatisfaction. Nearly  $\frac{3}{4}$  of private school teachers found salary unacceptable as compared to  $\frac{1}{3}$  of urban public school teachers.

- Connect

re: primary reason for attrition

I notice that the simple fact of the matter is that the highest attrition is within the first five years and that the reason for leaving at that time is most often personal. In other words there is probably not a lot to be done about this population of teaching leavers. In my own case, I taught for only one year before starting a family. My daughter taught for three years and started her family. My daughter in-law has been working for two years, but is waiting to get their house built and then get pregnant. She doesn't plan to continue working once they start their family. I think all three of us are not only good teachers, but excellent teachers. And we enjoy it. But the same values that contribute to our love of teaching drive us to invest time and energy into our own families once they begin to grow. And we have been fortunate enough economically to be able to invest ourselves in this way.

re: small school teacher attrition

I find it interesting that private schools, especially small private schools are losing teachers at the fastest rates and that the reasons for leaving are related to personal issues of low salary and job dissatisfaction. Especially interesting is the finding that these schools lose teachers due to poor administrative support at a higher rate than other schools. As the report notes, this is counter-intuitive to long-standing assumptions that smaller schools have stronger communities.

The strength is assumed to result from the inherent nature of smaller bureaucracy and general commitment to core ideals of the school community. However, I know from experience that there is much more to this story. I have had some exposure to smaller schools and have observed that these schools more commonly suffer a recipe guaranteed for teacher burn-out: under-funding coupled with high community expectations and demanding schedules. Furthermore, teachers in small schools are more often requested to teach outside of their area of certification in addition to teaching in their own area of concentration. The additional teaching load complicates a teacher's

schedule with more challenging preparation. Additionally, administrators are too frequently strong on ideological motivation but low in management and/or education background. Personality and competence of the administrator can make a world of difference in these situations.

In some situations, the pay simply is not enough to compensate for the personal investment that teachers must make unless they are personally committed to the school's founding principles, or gain personal compensation (such as education for their own children) in return for their personal time/energy investment. I've also been in a small school environment that had excellent leadership from the parent-led school board and the school administrator who worked together in partnership. That school manages to recruit teachers and keep them much longer than expected even though the pay is extremely low because it is such a great environment to work in.

re: teacher status in general

For better or worse, teaching in the U.S. is generally not perceived as a lifelong career. The pay is not high enough to make it viable for a single income family and the status is also low. I think the low status is due to more than just pay, although low pay is a reflection of perceived low value. In my opinion, there are a number of social factors contributing to the low value of teachers in our society. First, we have inherited the historical tradition of pulling teachers out from wherever we can find them for normal schools in the eastern colonies, family tutoring on southern plantations and one-room school houses across the western plains. Second, we have the political/economic decision to create free public schooling for the masses to support the industrial revolution. And third, we have our American egalitarianism and democracy that blurs the distinctions of authority. I think these factors contribute to teachers being perceived as just another community employee who has the additional expectation of responding to community performance pressures.

This is in contrast to the status of teachers in other countries, even in Europe, where the role of teacher has much more respect. I'm not sure that teacher salaries are any different comparatively; they may even have a lower salary. And believe it or not, they usually have longer hours and more school responsibilities than we typically have as teachers in the U.S. I read a book a couple of years ago that cited research about differences between schools and teaching situations in different countries, but cannot remember the title and haven't been able to find it on the internet. I'll keep looking for the reference. But my teacher friends from Britain, Australia and New Zealand have told me that they typically are expected to build their own classroom curriculum from the bottom up, do playground duty during recess, supervise lunchtime a couple of times a week, oversee after school tutoring and clubs while teaching all day without a planning period. In third-world countries where I've lived village teachers frequently go unpaid for long periods of time. But when anything important is being decided, they have a seat with the elders. And they generally have much more authority over the children in their school such that they can call on favors from their students whenever there is work to be done. In other countries the role is valued. They are respected. And education is perceived to be a privilege rather than a right. The social factors make a difference.

- Questions

I'm wondering if there are any international statistics on teacher attrition rates. I've seen data about international schools that pretty much reflects the data in this Education Week article with the added factor of culture stress as a contributing factor to attrition. But I don't know what the attrition rate for national school teachers is. Typically, they have been tracked into teaching and don't have a lot of other options.

What does comparative research about women in the workplace and their longevity on the job in various different professions reveal? What factors contribute to decisions to remain in the workplace? How does pay-scale affect the decision? Marital status? Dependent children?

Are there differences in attrition between men and women? Rate? Pay-scale? Public vs. Private? Longevity? Career path? What other factors are influential? How does each affect longevity?

What kind of results would you get if you change the focus of inquiry from “what are the factors contributing to attrition?” to “what are the factors contributing to longevity?”

And is there correlation between teacher attrition and schools that perform well/poorly?

- Extend

The European Council of International Schools publishes a journal that attempts to apply current educational research and issues in the international school context. See [www.ecis.org](http://www.ecis.org)

**Scholastic.** “Wanted 2 Million Teacher”

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/professional/teachertoteacher/2MillionTeachers.htm>

- Remember

Article gives more analysis of the teacher shortage problem and less research statistics. Particularly interesting to note is the attention to regional differences. A shortfall of 2 million teachers in the next ten years is expected. This is not actually that critical of a shortfall generally, however, there is a critical need for teachers in some regions and some settings where as many as 50% of the teachers may be working under emergency certification. Working conditions rather than salary rate were cited as most likely to the jobs that potential teachers are likely to accept and their longevity in the job. A six-point checklist is offered for evaluating whether a particular teaching community includes elements that attract teachers to come and stay. The six areas are:

- Safety of location
- Parent involvement
- Partnering of new teachers with experienced teachers
- Teachers are respected and valued by the community
- Teachers share in the decision-making
- Pay is commensurate with education/background, reflects cost-of-living, and rewards for student performance

- Connect

Some of the reasons for attrition cited in this article are claimed to be misconceptions in the article for Education Week. This made me wonder about the publication date which is not noted on the webpage. However, the most recently cited reference date in the article is 1999. And most of the other dates cited are slightly earlier than that date. So I conclude that the original publication for this Instructor article would have been 1999 or early 2000. The date accounts for the discrepancy of information between this article and the EW article which cites newer research reported to adjust interpretations of teacher trends.

Another difference between this article and the EW article is the focus on regional differences. Statistics in the EW article were nation-wide. I missed this over-sight when I read it and am glad for an adjustment in my perception of the data that this article gives me.

The need for better care of entering teachers is a theme that came up when I was working at an international school in the mid-90s. First year teaching is demanding in and of itself. Even experienced teachers find teaching in a cross-cultural context overseas to an additional strain. We started a mentoring system to address the issue and realized that we could only handle a certain number of inexperienced teachers each year in order to maintain balance with those who might be available to offer help. We also had each teacher paired up with a family who agreed to make the extra effort to see if the teacher needed help with anything. These families also offered the teachers ongoing encouragement or appreciation in tangible ways. I learned a lot from our administrator at that school. She had perfected the art of one-minute encouragements. She

spent a portion of each day just sort of cruising around the school doing “people time”. She was great at making quick observations and offering a bit of help, or just giving affirmation. As a teacher, some days it was just enough to make eye contact through the doorway. I knew that she knew that I was there. It was enough.

Though I’m not reviewing it here, I also skimmed through the Texas Public Policy Foundation report on teacher salary reform in Texas. It connects the national statistics with the local scene in Texas. The Texas report was published in November of 2005 in preparation for the special session on education (which actually got nowhere. But that is a different story) This report sheds further light on the issue of teacher salaries by going beyond mere base-pay comparisons or even cost-of-living adjustments to using market analysis to determine appropriateness of teacher pay. According to the report, if you use the balance of supply and demand as a determinant for value, teachers in Texas are being paid about what they ought to be paid overall. But again, there are discrepancies when you look at individual districts and particular teaching specialties. And work conditions are a huge contributing factor to teacher longevity and job satisfaction.

- Question

This *Instructor* article is at least seven years old now. In light of the more recent EW article, I wonder what the current projected need for teachers is nation wide?

I also wonder about the impact of Teach America. A number of kids in our community have gone to the east coast to teach in urban schools there with this program. Most of the kids stay much longer than I would expect, so they must be doing something right. How can we incorporate more elements of private sector practice into our public schools? Or is school reform a hopeless cause because of the politics?

- Extend

Achievement First is another non-profit that recruits college grads to teach in challenging, under-served urban schools. Amistad Academy is a charter school in New Haven, Connecticut that is managed by Achievement First. It is a corporately funded charter school, but they are maintaining the budget for the school to be comparable with other school budgets elsewhere in the district so that they can compare results. One of the foundational elements of their design is teacher training and mentoring. Their homepage is <http://www.amistadacademy.org/index.html>

I first learned about this school on a PBS show titled “Closing the Achievement Gap”. The Home page for that program at PBS is <http://www.pbs.org/closingtheachievementgap/index.html>  
Here is a link to the transcript of the program:  
[http://www.pbs.org/closingtheachievementgap/cert\\_transcript.pdf](http://www.pbs.org/closingtheachievementgap/cert_transcript.pdf)

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## **Teacher Education Research**

### **Effective Reflective Practice: In Search of Meaning in Learning about Teaching**

J. John Loughran in *Journal of Teacher Education* 2002; 53; 33

<http://jte.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/53/1/33>

- Remember

I chose this article to read for two reasons. First, our course readings are leading me to reflect more on the role of reflection in learning, how to promote quality reflection, ideas for structured reflection, and how/when to recommend structured reflection. Also, as I perused the articles in *Journal of Teacher Education* I noted that learning through reflection on practice appears to be an “up and coming” topic for professional development and teacher training. I’m curious to learn more.

In reality, however, the main points of this article that I want to remember are far fewer than I expected. The author is mostly making an argument in favor of the value of reflection for

improving practice without addressing the more practical questions that I have. He does point out that there are varying levels of reflection and that to be effective for improving practice, reflection must relentlessly pursue different points of view. Furthermore, it is most useful in the context of actual practice that is meaningful to the learner. Real experience in classroom problem-solving is at the core. Making various meanings through experimentation and reflection is the process. Discovering taken-for-granted assumptions that influence our practice is the potential outcome. The author suggests that recording anecdotes is one effective strategy for encouraging reflection. Experienced practitioners also rely on peer discussions and reflective journaling about practice while keeping the question, “what am I learning about teaching and my practice in particular” at the fore of their thinking. This kind of reflection is a discipline that helps teachers to ward off the complacency and rationalization that led to mediocre instruction.

- Connect

The author notes that effective practitioners develop “attitudes for reflection” that he connects with Dewey’s open-mindedness, responsibility, and wholeheartedness. These also connect with Costa and Kallick’s *Habits of Mind*. And the discussion of rationalization led me to connect with our earlier reading of Linda & Paul, *Asking Essential Questions* as well as my own reading of Michael Michalkov’s articles about the common qualities of geniuses (see RR 10). Real-life is full of mystery, ambivalence, juxtaposition and outright awe. I can choose between just reinforcing my old thinking or learning something new. It is a matter of disposition and what I embrace.

A couple of semesters ago I did an independent study project that built research around me as a second language learner. It was essentially an extended reflection on my experience of learning a second language using the lens of current 2LA theory to interpret my experience and shed light on factors that contribute to successful 2L development. I guess that research project was essentially an extended reflection of practice. I didn’t know that was what it was called at the time. Now I can appreciate why I learned so much through the experience.

- Question

I’m still wondering about the practical how-to’s in regard to encouraging quality reflection in learners that I mentor or teach. I appreciate the value. I think I’m learning how to do it. But how to encourage it in others? Using essential questions will certainly help. But I frequently run into the problem of being too abstract. I need more practice/experience in asking the kinds of questions that will encourage my students to engage. What else is needed besides good questions to create an environment that encourages effective reflection versus rationalization or surface comment?

- Extend

More from John Dewey on reflective teaching:

Summary- <http://www.coe.ilstu.edu/scienceed/lorsbach/deweynotes.htm>

Original-

[http://spartan.ac.brocku.ca/~lward/Dewey/Dewey\\_1910a/Dewey\\_1910\\_c.html](http://spartan.ac.brocku.ca/~lward/Dewey/Dewey_1910a/Dewey_1910_c.html)

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## **Community Centered Environments**

Gehring, J. (2000) The Critical Friends Projects: Are They Critical?

<http://hale.pepperdine.edu/~jmgehrin/classwork/ED638/ARP/Final/01.html>

- Remember

This site is an action research report done by a technology in education student. The project explores the practical use of the concept called “Lateral Mentoring” in which peers meet together

regular for reflection and discussion of their practice. Lateral Mentoring has its foundation in Wenger & Lave's idea of communities of practice. This student sets out to explore the whether participation in Lateral Mentoring is effective in changing classroom practice in regard to technology use. Most interesting to me, is the student's research design and careful documentation of the problems he ran into and the problem responses that he chose. He ran into a number of roadblocks that hinder effectiveness of the model including conflicted schedules, administration disinterest, technology delays, and off-topic discourse emanating from teacher distraction. However, most of those who participated rated the opportunity to share about practice with peers as being highly valuable.

- Connect

I've only peripherally engaged with Wenger and Communities of Practice. Can't recall when I was first introduced to the concept. Sometime in the 90s, I think. The context was building communities of practice for reading and writing in a book review. I was out in the middle of nowhere at the time, but could see the importance of the concept for my children who were living so far away from a full English speaking community. As a result of just reading that review, I made a more purposeful effort to create meaningful reasons for my children to write and to share what they were reading. I have since grown an appreciation for the concept's application in the context of language learning. This reading is leading me to extend communities of practice thinking to .... professional development and training.

Bransford discusses the need for teachers to share successes and failures with pedagogy and curriculum development when participating in communities of practice. (pg199) And that connection is forcing me to look deep into my heart of hearts which, I have to admit, so much prefers the role of expert over the role of learner. I do it reflexively. A lot of times in my responses to peers I come right out with advice rather than reflective questions. Many times I am simply just following a mental connection that my peer's comments have elicited but I'm sure it would be more respectful and productive for others if I would slow down and ask questions instead. I'm ready to investigate the original now – look for internet connections.

- Question

The student's description of research process left out details about how individual sessions were conducted. He just says "different protocols were used" and notes that a variety of readings were explored. I want to know what protocols and which readings. Why did he choose those readings? How were they received? What actions on his part best facilitated discussion? What kinds of questions did he use? What kinds of questions did his participants use? What was the level of thinking in their reflection? Basically, I want to learn a lot more about how he did this so I can think about how I might do this.

I was unable to find anything else about "Critical Friends Groups" online. I'd really like to read more about the Annenberg Institute's project, but nothing showed up in my search. I'd like to learn more about the "how to's" as well as the "whys". I've never really read the foundational writings about communities of practice. I guess I'm ready now.

- Extend

I found a few fruitful references online to get me started and help me to "flesh out" my understanding of communities of practice in the online and international context.

Communities of Practice: A Literature Review (pdf format)

[http://educationaltechnology.ca/couros/publications/unpublishedpapers/communities\\_practice.pdf](http://educationaltechnology.ca/couros/publications/unpublishedpapers/communities_practice.pdf)

Applying a Communities of Practice Model to Research Partnerships in Australia (pdf file)

[www.aare.edu.au/05papc/ha05024y.pdf](http://www.aare.edu.au/05papc/ha05024y.pdf)

Online Master Communities of Practice: Collaborative Learning in an Intercultural Perspective (Denmark & Ireland)

[http://www.eurodl.org/materials/contrib/2004/Identifying\\_COPs.html](http://www.eurodl.org/materials/contrib/2004/Identifying_COPs.html)