

Positive veteran teachers: Who are they, and where are they to be found?

Geoffrey Lowe, Christina Gray, Peter Prout, Sarah Jefferson

Edith Cowan University, Australia

Therese Shaw

Telethon Institute and The University of Western Australia

Teacher career trajectory studies have identified a small group of veteran teachers who remain positive and committed to teaching, while others become disenchanted or disengaged. These, and related studies suggest key characteristics of positive veteran teachers revolve around a strong sense of agency and professional identity including: 1) a continuing desire to experiment and embrace challenges; 2) high levels of personal comfort in their teaching roles; and 3) a willingness to take on leadership roles across a range of capacities and contexts, and in turn be affirmed in these roles. While studies describe these characteristics, there has been little attempt to utilise them as the basis for constructs in the formal identification of these teachers, and in turn examine where these teachers are to be found in education systems. This article reports on a study in Australia which sought to utilise the characteristics to identify positive veteran teachers within a larger cohort, and examine demographic information surrounding them. Reported demographics include gender, location (city / country), age and school type (primary / secondary / K-12). The ability to identify these teachers and where they are to be found may help educational authorities understand and promote conditions in which more veteran teachers are able to sustain their passion and commitment to the job.

Introduction

A substantial body of research into the working lives of teachers focuses upon early-career teachers (Hextall, Gewirtz, Cribb & Mahony, 2007), and often reports from deficit positions such as why these teachers leave the profession (Cohen, 2009; Ewing & Smith, 2003; Hong, 2012; Le Cornu, 2013; Pillay, Goddard & Wilss, 2005; Singh & Billingsley, 1996). Few studies focus upon those who choose to remain, and in particular, older, so called 'veteran' teachers (Day & Gu, 2009). While most teacher career trajectory studies describe a steady decline in motivation towards the later career stages for the majority of teachers (Day & Gu, 2007; Fessler, 1985; Huberman, 1989, 1993; Steffy, Wolfe, Pasch & Enz, 2000; Sikes, Measor & Woods, 1985), some have identified a small cohort of veteran teachers who remain passionate and committed throughout their teaching careers (Day & Gu, 2007, 2009; Huberman, 1989, 1993; Meister & Ahrens, 2011). These studies, and others, have described a variety of characteristics associated with positive veteran teachers in broad generic terms.

The purpose of the present study was to synthesise and utilise the characteristics described across previous studies as a basis for a more formal identification of positive veteran teachers within a larger teaching cohort, and unpack the demographics surrounding them. Identifying and knowing where positive veteran teachers are located within teaching systems and sectors could potentially offer valuable insights into the work situations

which help sustain their passion and enthusiasm. Importantly, Day and Gu (2009), Meister and Ahrens (2011) and White (2008) have reported that career trajectories are not fixed; understanding positive veteran teachers and where they are to be found may help systems and sectors promote conditions by which all veteran teachers are able to sustain their passion and enthusiasm for longer.

Teacher career trajectories

Teacher career trajectories have been an enduring research topic (Armour, 2006; Adams, 1982; Day & Gu, 2007, 2009; Fessler, 1985; Hargreaves, 2000; Huberman, 1989, 1993; Ingvarson & Greenway, 1984; Sikes et al 1985; Steffy et al (2000), Steffy, 1989), and studies have consistently reported steady declines in teacher motivation towards the later stages of their careers. Three of the most enduring studies have been undertaken by Fessler (1985), Huberman (1989, 1993) and Day and Gu (2007). Fessler (1985) described eight career stages: 1) pre-service; 2) induction; 3) competence building; 4) enthusiastic and growing; 5) career frustration; 6) stable and stagnant; 7) career wind-down; and 8) career stagnant. Importantly in the context of this study were the later four stages describing growing dissatisfaction, stagnation and withdrawal. While criticised for assuming a linear progression for all teachers, Fessler (1985) did acknowledge the situated impact of the organisational environment, i.e. school hierarchies, on career trajectories, as well as the personal environment on individual teacher career trajectories.

The landmark Swiss study by Huberman (1989, 1993) identified five career stages, of which the last two have relevance to this study. He described the majority of Stage 4 teachers (teaching years 19 – 31) as ‘serene and conservative’ and Stage 5 teachers (teaching 32 years or more) as ‘disengaged’. Stage 4 and 5 teachers were described as moving from a highly energetic period (Stage 3) to one that was more reflective and self-accepting. However, within both stages, Huberman described four teacher subgroups: a minority who continued to seek new opportunities and challenges (labelled ‘continual renewal’ teachers), a larger group who were comfortable and sought to conserve energy (‘serene’), a conservative group characterised by growing scepticism (‘negative focusers’) and a fourth group who were active hostile (‘disenchanted’) towards curriculum or pastoral reform.

Day and Gu (2007, 2009) in turn described six Professional Life Phases (PLP). Like Huberman, they identified subgroups within each PLP which emerged as early as Stage 2 (teaching years 4 – 7). Labelled subgroup A, these teachers sustained engagement and maintained a strong sense of motivation and commitment throughout all PLPs. However, this subgroup was small, leading Day and Gu to posit:

... relatively less is known about the nature and tensions and challenges facing those who have had a substantial amount of experience in teaching (so called veteran teachers) and how and why they have managed (or not managed) to continue to fulfil their original call to teaching (p.441).

The discoveries of small cohorts of positive veteran teachers by both Day and Gu (2007) and Huberman (1989) have highlighted the danger in conceptualising teaching career trajectories as linear and deterministic, as not all teachers lose motivation over the course of their careers. Further, White (2008) stated that teachers move in and out of career phases, and “even a late-career teacher can return to being a novice if faced with a totally new and exotic teaching assignment” (p. 2). In addition, Acker (1995) reported female career trajectories to be different to males, while Riddell and Tett (2006) described unique social pressures on male teaching careers from age 40, suggesting potential gender differences among veteran teachers. Importantly in the context of this study, O’Sullivan (2006) advocated investigation of veteran teacher identity, but cautioned against ascribing career success in purely promotional terms as opposed to career satisfaction.

Characteristics of positive veteran teachers

For this study, the term ‘veteran’ was employed. Veteran included teachers over 40 years of age, as well as those who had taught for 20 years or more, and functioned as a synthesis of the parameters and definitions employed by Fessler (1985), Huberman (1989, 1993), Day and Gu (2009), and others. For example, both Day and Gu (2009) and Ben-Peretz and McCulloch (2009) acknowledged the problem of consensus as to the length of service or time for a teacher to be classified as a ‘veteran’. While studies have affirmed that groups of positive veteran teachers exist, less is known about the shared characteristics of this group. The literature describes broad, dynamic and multifaceted characteristics associated with agency and professional identity, which for this study have been categorised as 1) experimentation and personal challenge; 2) comfort in the role; and 3) ‘active’ and ‘passive’ leadership. These broadly correspond with the ‘situated’ and ‘professional’ dimensions described by Day and Gu (2009) while potentially capturing general characteristics described in other studies. Of note is the focus on the characteristics of positive veteran teachers rather than assessments of their effectiveness (Day & Gu, 2007). However, by inference, the two are inexorably linked, as by nature one should impact the other.

Experimentation and personal challenge

Experimentation and personal challenge is categorised as having links to identity, namely renewal and relevance. Huberman (1993) reported experimenting and personal challenge as being driven by both internal and external needs; positive veteran teachers naturally sought to update and renew their teaching practice as part of their professional identity. However, experimentation and personal challenge was also part of a self-reflection process rationalising the need (and value) in embracing broader educational reforms. Similarly, Meister and Ahrens (2011) and Thorburn (2011) described their study participants as being motivated to seek new opportunities by an internal desire to renew practice and external recognition of the need to avoid becoming stale and redundant. Day and Gu (2009) described the personal driver of updating and renewing classroom practice as a largely internal motivational state associated with professional identity, notably a strong sense of commitment to teaching. They noted a link between renewal and resilience (Day & Gu, 2009). This has been described by Matti et al. (2002) as ‘hardiness’.

Notions of hardiness bear a striking resemblance to the concept of ‘Grit’ (Robertson-Kraft & Duckworth, 2014) which is an emerging and as yet little understood area of study in the teacher career field.

However, resilience and hardiness was categorised in this study context as a continuous desire to renew and maintain relevance over the lifetime of a teaching career in response to a constantly evolving education landscape (Milstein & Henry, 2000; Steffy, 1989). Further, Thorburn (2011) speculated that the ability of systems and sectors to encourage and promote renewal of practice may be central to teacher retention, while Meister and Ahrens (2011) described a link between resilience and agency; the courage to be a risk-taker, as renewal of teaching practice can involve an element of the unknown. In broader ‘extrinsic’ terms, Hargreaves (2000) and Meister and Ahrens (2011) ascribed the importance of school systems in encouraging and supporting teachers in renewing practice and risk-taking. They stressed the importance of providing ongoing professional development for all teachers regardless of career stage, while Thorburn (2011) and Day and Gu (2009) noted the often false assumption that veteran teachers are seen as less able to adapt to change and thus often not encouraged or empowered to do so. Kinman et al. (2011), White (2008) and Steffy (1989) described ongoing personal challenge as an external driver in career progression. Conversely, Thorburn (2011) and Near (1984) have described the debilitating nature of stagnation when teachers perceive little challenge left in the job and feel an overwhelming sense of sameness.

Comfort in the role

Comfort in the role appears to be closely associated with agency and can be categorised as two states: comfort in terms of teaching efficacy (internal), and in terms of making a difference to students’ lives (external). In relation to teaching efficacy, both Huberman (1993) and Day and Gu (2007) reported high levels of comfort with abilities and practice, clearly defined professional identities and high self-efficacy among positive veteran teachers. This is a long established theme: Bean (1992) also described a strong sense of teaching efficacy while Cohen (2009), Lightfoot (1985), Martin et al. (2011) and Steffy (1989) all described older teachers feeling comfortable and in control in their classrooms. In affirming the importance of not ascribing career success in purely promotional terms, Thorburn (2011) stated that while failing to gain promotion on at least eight occasions, his primary study participant maintained a positive outlook by focusing on the pleasure and satisfaction gained from being in the classroom. Thorburn (2011) summarised the internal and external focus of comfort in the role as “a sense of agency, and a belief that they could continue to make a positive contribution to learning and achievement of pupils” (p. 340).

Leadership

While ‘experimentation and personal challenge’, and ‘comfort’ represent states associated with identity and agency, ‘leadership’ can be categorised as being more externally situated. Leadership may also operate as ‘passive’ and ‘active’ states in which positive veteran teachers embrace leadership opportunities in some form (‘active’ state), or are affirmed by

the support of school leadership ('passive' state). As an active state, seeking leadership roles within schools, including the mentoring of beginning teachers, was reported as pivotal in terms of veteran teacher retention (Thorburn, 2011; White, 2008) and sustaining veteran teacher interest and motivation (Day, 2008; Day & Gu, 2009; Gibbs & Miller, 2014; Hargreaves, 2000). In citing an Education Week Research Centre project into teacher recruitment and retention in the USA, Viadero (2017) highlighted beginning teacher mentoring, and role modelling within schools as central to veteran teacher retention. Huberman (1989) and Meister & Ahrens (2011) have also discussed the value of drawing upon the experience of veteran teachers in the implementation of educational initiatives.

As a passive state, Day and Gu (2009), Fransson and Frelin (2016), Meister and Ahrens (2011), Pillay et al. (2005), Singh and Billingsley (1998) and White (2008) described the importance of recognition of effort from school leadership teams in terms of 1) feedback and encouragement; 2) autonomy and trust; and 3) reasonable role expectations placed upon veteran teachers. By contrast, Thorburn (2011) noted the often hierarchical and controlling 'top-down' nature of schools which can have a stifling impact on older teachers, leading to disengagement and disenchantment. Conversely, both he and Cohen (2009) described the value of flattened structures, which may promote more collegial working arrangements. All of the above studies have described veteran teachers as an often untapped and undervalued resource.

Inherent in the three categories utilised in this study is the assertion by Fullan (1993) that teachers rely on both 'inner' learning (intrapersonal), as well as 'outer' learning (interpersonal) for sustained commitment. Further, it is duly noted that both learning states can be influenced by events in teachers' lives outside school which can positively or negatively impact motivation and commitment regardless of career stage (Day & Gu, 2009).

Having summarised descriptions of characteristics associated with positive veteran teachers, this study then set out to test whether the three categories (experimentation and personal challenge, comfort in the role, leadership) could be employed in the identification of positive veteran teachers within a wider population of veteran teachers.

Method

Participants

The study was undertaken in 2017 in Western Australia (WA), a geographical location covering 2.646 million square kilometres. Participants were drawn from across the state, and comprised 145 K-12 teachers from both the independent (AISWA) and Catholic (CEWA) sectors. Qualifications for participation included: 1) teachers over 40 years of age and / or 2) teachers with over 20 years of teaching experience. The research team initially contacted school principals explaining the nature of the research, and asked them to disseminate the information to appropriate staff. Participation was voluntary, and was undertaken with ethics approval from the researchers' University, the Catholic Education Office (CEWA), and the Association of Independent Schools of WA (AISWA).

Instrument

Participants were asked to complete an anonymous and confidential online questionnaire devised by the researchers. Reported in this article were four demographic items: gender, school location, age and school type. Location was included because of the sheer physical size of the state, and was categorised as metropolitan, regional, rural and remote (DoE, 2019), while age was divided into 40 – 49, 50 – 51, and 60 + to accommodate those classified within Huberman's (1989) Stages 4 and 5, and Day and Gu's (2007) PLP 5 and 6. School type was classified as primary, secondary, K-12 or 'other', with respondents being given the option to define 'other'. The four demographic questions are included in Appendix A.

In addition, 16 items were employed to identify positive veteran teachers from within the overall cohort. These were based upon the categories of experimentation and personal challenge (importance of change and innovation, seeking and incorporating new teaching ideas, seeking professional development opportunities and risk-taking), comfort (sense of personal satisfaction, comfort as a professional, feeling valued, comfort in the role) and 'active' leadership (role modelling, providing leadership, mentoring). Items relating to 'passive' leadership were not included because of their highly subjective, situated and personal nature. For all items, teachers were asked to rate themselves against a range of negatively and positively focused questions, on a 7 point Likert scale (see Appendix B). The instrument was developed and refined over a 12 month period and piloted before implementation, returning an overall Cronbach alpha of .80.

Findings

Of the 145 teachers who responded, 47 were male and 98 were female. This broadly conformed with current ratios of male to female teachers across Australia (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2017). In relation to age, 77 teachers were aged 40 – 49, 52 were aged 50 – 59 and 16 aged 60 plus, while 91 respondents identified as teaching in the metropolitan area, 48 identified as regional, four were rural and two remote. Of the total, 42 were primary school teachers, 99 were secondary teachers and four taught K-12. No teacher identified school type as 'other'.

To test the validity of the three organising categories as constructs, data was subjected to exploratory factor analysis (EFA), and initial findings indicated some inconsistencies associated with the four negatively worded items (3, 8, 9, 12) which were not apparent in the initial piloting. The researchers speculated that this may have been the result of many participants misreading the negatively worded questions, and data was reanalysed following the removal of these items. The remaining 12 items were then subjected again to EFA followed by confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to determine the fit of the model. EFA was conducted in *SPSS* (V25) while CFA was undertaken in *Mplus*, and CFA results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Confirmatory factor analysis

Construct	Item	Item summary	1	2	3
Experimentation and personal challenge	1	Personal importance of change and innovation	.763		
	5	Importance of seeking new teaching ideas	.831		
	7	Importance of incorporating new teaching ideas	.834		
	11	Actively seek PD	.628		
	13	Risk taker	.593		
Leadership	2	Importance of being a role model		.567	
	6	Importance of mentoring younger teachers		.544	
	15	Take leadership roles to support change		.767	
Comfort in the role	4	Sense of personal satisfaction			.351
	10	Comfortable as a professional			.714
	14	Feel valued within the school			.585
	16	Comfort in the role			.755

CFA on the remaining 12 items revealed that the three-factor model fitted adequately with the fit statistics. Of the three factors, experimentation and challenge emerged with the highest loadings. While the researchers acknowledged that higher factor loadings would have been more desirable e.g. $>.6$, they were satisfied with the results at this point and the instrument is undergoing continuing development and refinement.

Using participant ratings of 6/7 across cumulative ratings for each factor on the 7 point scale (high / very high) as the 'cut-off' score for classification as positive veteran teachers, data was then cross-tabulated against each of the demographic items. Findings revealed differences in numbers of positive veteran teacher ratings across the three factors, with 79 participants rating positive for experimentation and personal challenge, 50 for comfort in the role and 39 for leadership. The breakdown across each factor for gender is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Positive veteran teacher responses by factor and gender

N = 145	Male	Female	Total
Experimentation and challenge	17	62	79
Comfort in the role	11	39	50
Leadership	6	33	39

Experimentation and personal challenge returned the highest numbers, and represented 34% of the total male cohort (47), and 61% of the total female cohort (98). The percentage of positive female teachers against this factor was nearly double that of males. Similarly, 21% of the total male cohort were classified as positive for comfort in the role as against 39% of the total female cohort, and 13% of the male cohort against 34% for females against leadership. Of note was the very low numbers for 'leadership' reported from male teachers. In summary, findings revealed twice the percentage of positive veteran female teachers to male. Findings also suggested that both groups were more sustained by their sense of identity and agency, and less by leadership roles. Table 3 presents the findings for location against each factor.

Table 3: Positive veteran teacher responses by factor and location

N = 145	Metro.	Regional	Rural	Remote	Total
Experimentation and challenge	55	22	2	0	79
Comfort in the role	27	19	3	1	50
Leadership	25	12	1	1	39

Broadly similar distributions emerged as for gender; greater numbers were obtained for 'experimentation and challenge' and lower numbers in relation to 'leadership'. In percentage terms, 60% of metropolitan teachers rated as positive for 'experimentation and challenge', against 46% for regional and 50% for rural, while only 25% of the cohort rated as positive for 'leadership' across all locations. In summary, positive veteran teacher responses appeared roughly evenly distributed geographically. Table 4 presents findings by age against each factor.

Table 4: Positive veteran teacher responses by factor and age

N = 145	Aged 40 +	Aged 50 +	Aged 60 +	Total
Experimentation and challenge	48	22	9	79
Comfort in the role	22	22	6	50
Leadership	21	15	3	39

Table 4 indicates changing motivations among positive veteran teachers within the cohort over time. Analysis by factor recorded higher numbers of positive ratings among 40 + teachers in relation to 'experimentation and challenge' (62%), which decreased for the 50 + group (42%) before rebounding in the 60 + group (56%). Conversely, a smaller number of teachers in the 40 + age range rated for 'comfort' (29%), which increased among 50 + (42%). While higher numbers were recorded for 40 + teachers for 'challenge' over 'comfort', this was reversed for 50 + teachers where for the first time; 'comfort' produced greater numbers. Again, 'leadership' generated the fewest responses, especially in the 60 + age range. Table 5 presents findings for the type of school against each factor.

Table 5: Positive veteran teacher responses by factor and school type

N = 145	Primary	Secondary	K-12	Total
Experimentation and challenge	34	44	1	79
Comfort in the role	19	30	1	50
Leadership	16	23	0	39

Table 5 illustrates higher ratings across all three factors for primary school teachers over secondary school teachers in percentage terms against the total cohort, with 80% of primary teachers rating positive for 'experimentation and personal challenge' against 42% of secondary teachers. Ratings decreased overall for 'comfort' and 'leadership', but 45% of the total primary cohort rated positive for comfort and 38% for leadership, against 30% for comfort and 23% for leadership among secondary school teachers. In summary, the study revealed the highest percentage of positive veteran teachers within this cohort were

found in primary schools. Table 6 presents findings for each factor against gender and age, along with the total number of positive participants per factor.

Table 6: Positive veteran teachers by factor, gender and age

N = 145	40+ male	40+ female	50 + male	50 + female	60 + male	60 + female
Exp. and chall.	8	38	4	17	4	5
Comfort	2	19	6	16	2	4
Leadership	4	17	2	13	0	3
Total	18	54	17	32	9	7

Findings for gender and age against the three factors confirmed more positive female teachers than males across all three age ranges, with female teachers 60 + being collectively the most positive. Within factors, both male and female numbers for 'comfort' increased from 40 +. Overall, the percentage of positive female teachers steadily increased with age, while numbers of positive male veterans declined across all three factors, although caution is required because of the low number of participants in the age 60+ category. Table 7 presents the findings for each factor against gender and location, along with the total number of positive participants per factor.

Table 7: Positive veteran teachers by factor, gender and location

N = 145	Metro - male	Metro - female	Region - male	Region - female	Rural - male	Rural - female	Remote - male	Remote - female
Exp. and chall.	13	41	2	18	1	1	0	1
Comfort	5	22	3	15	2	1	0	1
Leadership	5	20	0	12	1	0	0	1
Total	32	57	10	35	2	1	0	1

Findings for gender and location confirmed the distributions observed earlier towards higher percentages of positive female teachers, with differences most pronounced in regional schools. Within each factor, positive female teachers outnumbered males 2:1 in percentage terms. While no regional male teacher rated positively for 'leadership', this may reflect the number of participants rather than the attitudes of those who did. The findings indicated slightly higher positive numbers among male metropolitan teachers in terms of 'experimentation and personal challenge', but less for 'comfort' and 'leadership'. In summary, city-based veteran female teachers emerged with the most numerous positive ratings within the study cohort. Table 8 presents the findings for factors and gender cross-tabulated by school type, along with the total number of positive participants per factor.

Findings for gender and school type revealed the highest numbers of positive female teachers within the cohort to come from primary schools. Conversely, the lowest number of positive male teachers were identified in secondary schools. With the exception of primary schools, substantially more female teachers were positive in terms of personal challenge, comfort and leadership than males, while leadership again rated lowest for male secondary school teachers.

Table 8: Positive veteran teachers by factor, gender and school type

N = 145	Primary - male	Primary - female	Sec - male	Sec - female	K-12 - male	K-12 - female
Exp. and chall.	6	34	9	26	0	2
Comfort	4	18	6	19	1	2
Leadership	3	14	2	18	1	1
Total	7	34	9	31	1	2

Limitations

Limitations associated with this study are acknowledged. A larger sample would have preferable, but the number of respondents may be reflective of the busy lives of teachers, the motivation of people to respond to online surveys in general, the size of the overall veteran teacher pool in WA made available through the agencies of CEWA and AISWA, and the reliability of principals passing on information to the relevant staff. The numbers, while large enough to determine overarching categories and broad demographics, made more nuanced statistical analysis unreliable for some categories; for example, the small number of respondents from rural and remote regions reduced its statistical reliability. Further, a relatively large number of positive responses were returned within the cohort. The researcher team were aware that those who did respond would most likely be motivated teachers i.e. those positive and committed by nature, and thus a relatively high percentage of positive responses was anticipated. Finally, the researchers were aware of the limitations of survey methods whereby self-rating respondents can answer questions to please the researchers (Burns, 2000). Nevertheless, the researchers were satisfied with the initial response rate and verification of research assumptions, and are confident that, with further refinement, the instrument can become a valuable mechanism for identifying positive veteran teachers.

Discussion

Three main findings emerged from this study. The first was the high numbers of positive female teachers compared to male teachers. While 73% of teachers in Australia are female (ABS, 2015) and 68% of respondents in this study were female, the study revealed a higher ratio of positive female – male teachers across all three factors. This raises questions as to why veteran female teachers may be universally more positive, and may reflect assertions by Acker (2005) that female career trajectories are different to males, as well as Riddell and Tett (2006) that male veteran teachers face a unique set of pressures beyond age 40. Further, female responses became increasingly more positive across each age range while males declined, and the ratio of positive female teachers to males remained consistent across location and school type.

The second main finding was the higher comparative number of positive primary school teachers than secondary school teachers within the cohort, confirming similar findings by Day and Gu (2009) in the UK. When cross-tabulated for gender, both male and female primary school teachers were more positive than their secondary counterparts. Little

difference emerged in terms of location; primary school teachers were comparatively more positive across all geographic locations.

The third main finding was that teachers in the 60+ age range were comparatively the most positive. This may have been due to vagaries of the cohort whereby a larger cohort may have produced different findings (especially in the 60+ age range), or that less enthusiastic teachers leave teaching earlier while positive ones who love the job remain. Despite this, given the higher number of respondents in the 40 + and 50 + age ranges, the findings still suggested a greater comparative number of positive teachers in their 50s, again mirroring findings by Day & Gu (2009). This could indicate a unique trend among positive veteran teachers (that positive teachers become more positive over time rather than less), and it would appear to support the assertion by Huberman (1993) and Day and Gu (2009) that career trajectories are not necessarily linear and deterministic. It also runs contrary to earlier general career trajectory literature, which indicated overall declines in career satisfaction among all veteran teachers (Fessler, 1985). In summary, the highest percentage of positive teachers identified in this study were female primary school teachers in the 60 + age range.

In terms of individual factor ratings, a greater number of positive ratings were returned for 'experimentation and personal challenge', suggesting most positive teachers were sustained by their sense of professional identities as teachers, particularly in relation to internal motivators surrounding relevance and commitment to teaching, or external motivators such as renewal and the need to embrace educational reforms, than 'comfort' or 'leadership'. This factor was slightly more prevalent among metropolitan teachers, possibly reflective of greater professional development opportunities available to them, or closer proximity to centres of educational reform. Conversely, comparatively more regional teachers rated 'comfort' in their ability over their metropolitan colleagues. 'Experimentation and personal challenge' also emerged highest in the 40 + age range which may reflect Huberman's (1989) Stage 4 in that these teachers are still in a highly energetic teaching phase. Certainly, the slight increase in the percentage of ratings for 'comfort' among 50 + teachers may lend support for Huberman's Stage 5 whereby teachers become more reflective and self-accepting towards the later stages of their careers and less driven by the desire to seek promotion. The greater number of positive ratings for 'experimentation and personal challenge' also concurs with descriptions of positive teachers as 'constant renewal' teachers (Huberman, 1993), and also emerged as the most common factor among positive primary school teachers. Disturbingly, 'active leadership', including additional responsibilities surrounding mentoring and role modelling in this study (professional dimension – Day & Gu, 2009) rated lowest of the three factors and was consistently low for all teachers, and specifically male secondary teachers.

Overall, the principal findings of this study suggest that the majority of positive veteran teachers may be sustained and driven by their personal sense of professional identity and commitment, regardless of location, rather than by leadership opportunities within schools. Whether low 'active' leadership ratings relate to lack of recognition of effort and feedback, issues of autonomy and trust, reasonable role expectations, mentoring

opportunities or empowerment is certainly worthy of future examination, and is arguably a key finding of this study.

Conclusion

This study is predicated on the fact that much research attention has been focused on early career teachers and why they leave the profession (Hextall et al., 2007). Less attention has been directed towards identifying and understanding the positive veteran teachers who remain, or the conditions which might help younger teachers sustain a positive outlook as they progress towards becoming veterans. Given that teaching can be a stressful and demanding profession (Le Cornu, 2013; Pillay et al., 2005), identifying, retaining and supporting positive veteran teachers assumes great importance, given reported high departure rates from the profession, disruption caused by absenteeism, disengagement, poor performance and loss of corporate knowledge, and the constant need to induct and assist new teachers (Clandinin et al., 2015; Martin, Sass & Schmitt, 2011). This is coupled with the general aging of the teaching workforce (Day & Gu, 2009). The findings suggest that ongoing career commitment for veteran teachers may not relate solely to the physical working environment, i.e. pay and conditions, but to the personal and emotional environment surrounding professional identity, agency and leadership.

The purpose of this study was to create a mechanism for formal identification of positive veteran teachers, and unpack demographics surrounding them. The literature offered a degree of consensus as to the general characteristics associated with this group, which in turn informed development of the instrument employed in this study. Within the study cohort, twice as many female teachers were recorded as positive compared to their males counterparts, and primary school teachers were comparatively more positive than secondary school teachers. The fluid nature of responses largely affirmed that career trajectories are not linear and fixed, and that the majority appear sustained primarily by their sense of professional identity relating to relevance and renewal.

However, further targeted study is now required into why strong differences emerge between gender and school type among veteran teachers, as well as broader studies into how to better utilise this group as a resource, especially in relation to leadership, including mentoring of beginning teachers, and role-modelling in general. Why, for example, did female teachers emerge as twice as positive as their male counterparts, and why were primary school teachers more positive than their secondary colleagues?

Finally, given that career trajectories are not fixed, it may be that a better understanding of the characteristics of positive veteran teachers and how these characteristics can be nurtured and encouraged over the course of a career may help in the development of enhanced support mechanisms, which can potentially empower and reinvigorate all veteran teachers. As the teaching workforce ages, sustaining all veteran teachers including those who might be disenchanted or disengaged will assume greater importance, as the quality of teaching directly impacts student outcomes. In summary, Huberman (1993) stated "... teachers have as many chances to finish their careers 'well' through positive

focussing, as they have to finish their careers ‘poorly’ through negative focussing” (p. 247).

References

- Australian Bureau of Statistics (2015). Commentary on in-school staff, 2015.
<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Previousproducts/4221.0Main%20Features502015?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=4221.0&issue=2015&num=&view>
- Acker, S. (1995). Gender and teachers’ work. *Review of Research in Education*, 21(1), 99-162.
<https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X021001099>
- Adams, R. D. (1982). Teacher development: A look at changes in teacher perceptions and behavior across time. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 33(4), 40-43.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/002248718203300410>
- Armour, K. (2006). Physical education teachers as career-long learners: A compelling research agenda. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy* 11(3), 203-207.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17408980600986231>
- Bean, R. (1992). *The four conditions of self-esteem* (2nd ed.). Cruz, CA: ETR Associates.
- Ben-Peretz, M. & McCulloch, G. (2009). International perspectives on veteran teachers: Introduction. *Teachers and Teaching*, 15(4), 403-408.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13540600903057153>
- Burns, R. (2000). *Introduction to research methods (4th ed.)*. French’s Forest, NSW: Pearson Educational.
- Clandinin, D. J., Long, J., Schaefer, L., Downey, C. A., Steeves, P., Pinnegar, E., McKenzie Robblee., S. & Wnuk, S. (2015). Early career teacher attrition: Intentions of teachers beginning. *Teaching Education*, 26(1), 1-16.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10476210.2014.996746>
- Cohen, R. M. (2009). What it takes to stick it out: Two veteran inner-city teachers after 25 years. *Teachers and Teaching*, 15(4), 471-492.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13540600903057252>
- Day, C. (2008). Committed for life? Variations in teachers’ work, lives and effectiveness. *Journal of Educational Change*, 9(3), 243-260. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-007-9054-6>
- Day, C. & Gu, Q. (2007). Variations in the conditions for teachers’ professional learning and development: sustaining commitment and effectiveness over a career. *Oxford Review of Education*, 33(4), 423-443. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054980701450746>
- Day, C. & Gu, Q. (2009). Veteran teachers: Commitment, resilience and quality retention. *Teachers and Teaching*, 15(4), 441-457. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540600903057211>
- Education Department of Western Australia (2019). Teach in rural, regional and remote WA. <https://www.education.wa.edu.au/rural-regional-and-remote>
- Ewing, R. A. & Smith, D. L. (2003). Retaining quality beginning teachers in the profession. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, 2(1), 15-32.
<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.498.7105&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
- Fessler, G. (1985). A model for teacher growth and development. In P. Burke & R. Heideman (Eds.), *Career-long teacher education*. Springfield, Ill. C. C. Thomas.
- Fransson, G. & Frelin, A. (2016). Highly committed teachers: What makes them tick? A study of sustained commitment. *Teachers and Teaching*, 22(8), 896-912.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2016.1201469>

- Fullan, M. (1993) *Changing forces*. London: Cassell.
- Gibbs, S. & Miller, A. (2014). Teachers' resilience and well-being: A role for educational psychology. *Teachers and Teaching*, 20(5), 609-621.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2013.844408>
- Hargreaves, A. (2000). Educational change takes ages: Life, career and generational factors in teachers' emotional responses to educational change. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 21(8), 967-983. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2005.06.007>
- Hextall, I., Gewirtz, A., Cribb, A. & Mahony, P. (2007). *Changing teacher roles, identities and professionalism: An annotated bibliography*. Kings' College London.
<https://www.kcl.ac.uk/ecs/research/research-centres/cppr/research/pastproj/changingteacherroles/bibliography.pdf>
- Hong, J. (2012). Why do some beginner teachers leave the school, and others stay? Understanding teacher resilience through psychological lenses. *Teachers and Teaching*, 18(4), 417-440. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2012.696044>
- Huberman, M. (1989). On teachers' careers: Once over lightly, with a broad brush. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 13(4), 347-362.
[https://doi.org/10.1016/0883-0355\(89\)90033-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/0883-0355(89)90033-5)
- Huberman, M. (1993). *The lives of teachers*. London and New York: Cassell and Teachers College Press.
- Ingvarson, L. & Greenway, P. (1984). Portrayals of teacher development. *Australian Journal of Education*, 28(1), 45-65. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000494418402800104>
- Kinman, G., Wray, S. & Strange, C. (2011). Emotional labour, burnout and job satisfaction in UK teachers: The role of workplace social support. *Educational Psychology*, 31(7), 843-856. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410.2011.608650>
- Le Cornu, R. (2013). Building early career teacher resilience: The role of relationships. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 38(4), 1-16.
<https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2013v38n4.4>
- Lightfoot, S. (1985). The lives of teachers. In L. Shulman & G. Sykes (Eds.), *Handbook of teaching and policy*. New York: Longman.
- Lortie, D. (1975). *Schoolteacher: A sociological study*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- MacDonald, D. (1999). Teacher attrition: A review of the literature. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 15(8), 835-848. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X\(99\)00031-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X(99)00031-1)
- Matti, S. R., Khoshaba, D. M., Persico, M., Lu, J., Harvey, R. & Bleeker, F. (2002). The personality construct of hardiness : II. Relationships with comprehensive tests of personality and psychopathology. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 36(1), 72-85.
<https://doi.org/10.1006/jrpe.2001.2337>
- Martin, N. K., Sass, D. A. & Schmitt, T. A. (2011). Teacher efficacy in student engagement, instructional management, student stressors and burnout: A theoretical model using in-class variables to predict teachers' intent-to-leave. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 28(4), 546-559. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2011.12.003>
- Meister, D. G. & Ahrens, P. (2011). Resisting plateauing: Four veteran teachers' stories. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 27(4), 770-778. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2011.01.002>
- McGrath, K & Van Bergen, P. (2017). Male teachers are an endangered species in Australia: New research. *The Conversation*, 18 September
<http://theconversation.com/male-teachers-are-an-endangered-species-in-australia-new-research-83464>

- Milstein, M. M. & Henry, D. A. (2000). *Spreading resiliency: Making it happen for schools and communities*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.
- Muthén, L. K. & Muthén, B. O. (2012). *Mplus user's guide, 7th ed.* Los Angeles, CA: Muthén & Muthén. <https://www.statmodel.com/ugexcerpts.shtml>
- Near, J. P. (1984). Reactions to the career plateau. *Business Horizons*, 27(4), 75-79. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0007-6813\(84\)90062-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/0007-6813(84)90062-4)
- O'Sullivan, M. (2006). Professional lives of Irish physical education teachers: Stories of resilience, respect and resignation. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 11(3), 265-284. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17408980600986314>
- Pillay, H., Goddard, R. & Wilss, L. (2005). Well-being, burnout and competence: Implications for teachers. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 30(2), 21-31. <https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2005v30n2.3>
- Ramsey, G. (2000). *Quality matters. Revitalizing teaching: Critical times, critical choices*. Sydney. NSW Department of Education and Training.
- Riddell, S. & Tett, L. (2006). *Gender and teaching: Where have all the men gone?* Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press.
- Robertson-Kraft, C. & Duckworth, A. (2014). True grit: Trait-level perseverance and passion for long-term goals predicts effectiveness and retention among novice teachers. *Teachers College Record*, 116(3). <http://www.tcrecord.org/Content.asp?ContentId=17352>
- Sikes, P. (1985). The life cycle of the teacher. In S. J. Ball & I. F. Goodson (Eds.), *Teachers' lives and careers* (pp. 27-60). Lewes, UK: Falmer Press.
- Sikes, P., Measor, L. & Woods, P. (1985). *Teacher careers: Crisis and continuities*. London: Falmer Press.
- Singh, K. & Billingsley, B. S. (1996). Intent to stay in teaching. *Remedial and Special Education*, 17(1), 37-47. <https://doi.org/10.1177/074193259601700105>
- Steffy, B. E., Wolfe, M. P., Pasch, S. H. & Enz, B. J. (2000). *Life cycle of the career teacher*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin. <https://us.corwin.com/en-us/nam/life-cycle-of-the-career-teacher/book10213>
- Steffy, B. E. (1989). *Career stages of classroom teachers*. Lancaster, PA: Technomic Publishing.
- Thorburn, M. (2011). "Still game": An analysis of the life history and career disappointments of one veteran male teacher of physical education in Scotland. *Educational Review*, 63(3), 329-343. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2011.571762>
- Viadero, D. (2018). Teacher recruitment and retention: It's complicated. *Education Week*, 23 January. <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2018/01/24/teaching-shortages-many-answers-for-a-complex.html>
- White, R. (2008). Teachers' professional life cycles. *International House Journal of Education and Development*, 24. <http://ihjournal.com/teachers-professional-life-cycles>

Appendix A

Q1 What is your age?

- 40-49 years (1) 50-59 years (2) 60+ years (3)

Q2 What is your gender?

- Male (1) Female (2)

Q3 Do you currently teach in:

- A primary school (1) A secondary school (2) A K-12 school (3)
 An Education Support Unit (4) Other. Please specify: (5)
- _____

Q4 What is the geographic location of your current school?

- Metropolitan (1) Provincial (2) Remote (3) Very remote (4)

Q5 What is your position in your school?

- Principal (1) Deputy / Assistant Principal (2) Head of Year/Learning area
(3) Teacher (4) Other. Please specify: (5) _____

Appendix B

1. It is important to me to incorporate change and innovation in my classroom and assessment practices

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

2. It is important to me to be a positive role model for other teachers

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

3. I feel confronted by the expectation of regularly applying new ideas in my teaching

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

4. I feel a sense of personal satisfaction when actively engaged in my classroom

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

5. It is important to me to seek out new ideas

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

6. It is important to me to mentor young and beginning teachers

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

7. I seek out new ideas to incorporate directly into my teaching and assessment practices

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

8. I believe my past and current teaching achievements in my workplace are undervalued.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

9. I would be uncomfortable leading change and innovation to teaching practices within my school.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

10. I feel comfortable in myself as a respected professional.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

11. I actively seek out new PD opportunities to improve my teaching.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

12. I feel confronted by changes to the established teaching and assessment practices I use in my classroom.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

13. I feel I am a risk-taker in my teaching practice.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

14. I perceive myself to be a person of value in my school.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

15. I take leadership roles to support change and innovation in my school.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

16. I am comfortable at incorporating new teaching and assessment practices in my classroom.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Dr Geoffrey Lowe (corresponding author) is a former secondary school music teacher, and is now Senior Lecturer in Education within the School of Education at Edith Cowan University in Western Australia. His research interests include music education in secondary schools, student motivation, and more recently teacher efficacy.

Email: g.lowe@ecu.edu.au

Dr Christina Gray is a former secondary drama teacher and now the Coordinator of Dance and Drama Education (Secondary) with the School of Education at Edith Cowan University, Western Australia. Christina's research interests include: drama and Arts education in secondary schools; teacher education and the practicum; teacher beliefs, portraiture and narrative methodologies.

Email: g.gray@ecu.edu.au

Dr Peter Prout's current passion and interest centres around 21st C teachers being highly skilled as reflective professionals who are committed to leading their students away from ignorance and towards high personal standards of intellect and social and community behaviour and leadership.

Email: p.prout@ecu.edu.au

Ms Sarah Jefferson is a former Head of English and Literacy Co-ordinator. She is currently a Unit Coordinator for the Master of Teaching Secondary at Edith Cowan University. Sarah's current research is examining the positive coping strategies of veteran West Australian teachers.

Email: s.jefferson@ecu.edu.au

Dr Thérèse Shaw, Telethon Institute and University of Western Australia, is a statistician with over 20 years' research experience, in particular in school-based health promotion research. Her expertise lies in study design, instrument development and testing, intervention implementation measurement and statistical evaluations of intervention trials.

Email: therese.shaw@telethonkids.org.au

Please cite as: Lowe, G., Gray, C., Prout, P., Jefferson, S. & Shaw, T. (2019). Positive veteran teachers: Who are they, and where are they to be found? *Issues in Educational Research*, 29(3), 823-840. <http://www.iier.org.au/iier29/lowe.pdf>