

REVIEW OF RESEARCH

RESEARCH RELATED TO TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

JOSEPH M. O'KEEFE, S.J.

Boston College

The December 11, 2001 issue of *The Washington Post* quoted University of Virginia professor Frederick M. Hess saying that

states should eliminate their current teacher certification requirements and instead ask prospective educators three simple questions: 1. Do you have a college degree? 2. Can you pass a test in your subject area? 3. Can you pass a criminal background check? If the answers are yes, yes and yes, you could apply for any teaching job in the state. (Morin & Dean, p. A31)

The article continued:

To those who are picturing a crime-free yet clueless misfit at the front of their child's class, Hess says: "Give school principals some credit. Allowing someone to apply for a job is not the same as guaranteeing them employment." (p. A31)

It is not surprising that a prominent national media outlet would cover the Hess report, one of many reports that want to turn schools into free markets. In his report, published in November 2001 as part of the Progressive Policy Institute's 21st Century Schools Project, Hess puts forth a competitive model that "treats teachers as autonomous professionals able to make their own informed decisions about skills and expertise development" (p. 2). He decries the patchwork of alternative stopgap measures that are the result of rigid requirements matched by a shortage of supply.

To support his arguments, Hess provides a history of certification along with data on the schools of education that have permission to certify. He bemoans the fact that the top 25% of education schools train only 5% of the roughly 200,000 new teacher graduates produced every year. He then belit-

tles schools of education because their rate of acceptance in graduate programs is generally lower than in other fields. He claims that certification has been based on the vague set of competencies that people use to describe skillful teaching. He then describes the problems that stem from licensing without concrete benchmarks. He holds up for emulation the self-policing and free-market dynamics that take place among nonlicensed professionals, such as entrepreneurs and journalists who "seek work and permit employers to screen on a variety of criteria" (p. 13).

Hess claims that certification is harmful because it dissuades potential teachers from entering the field. He makes some sweeping claims about ideological gatekeeping, that "the state essentially endorses a particular and fairly radical philosophy" (p. 16) (anti-racist, constructivist, feminist, etc.). He also claims that licensure undercuts professional development, but the causal link is unclear.

In place of the certification processes that exist in most places, Hess advocates various models of alternative certification, many of which are based on work done by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. He places these under the umbrella of "competitive certification," which would shrink in number and enhance in quality schools of education, increase the pool of applicants from which districts could choose (especially in areas that have experienced significant shortages), enhance professional development and lifelong learning, and ease processes for teacher termination.

Finally, Hess places the burden of hiring, training, monitoring, and dismissing teachers on school principals. Uninformed, it seems, of the burdens already placed on school administrators, he writes in conclusion: "If we trust administrators, then certification is unnecessary and entails significant costs. If we don't trust them, let us address that issue directly and not rely on the hollow promise of a problematic system of flimsy parchment barriers" (p. 18).

While one may disagree with Hess on a number of issues, his work is emblematic of the many changes that are taking place in the teaching profession. Three recently published articles can assist Catholic educators in their ongoing attempt to respond creatively to these changes. The first article offers new ways to look at career longevity, especially the notion of a lifelong career in teaching. The second article analyzes data about teacher retention from an organizational perspective. The third article sheds light on in-service teacher development, which will become increasingly important as people come to the profession through alternative licensure routes.

The first article, "The Next Generation of Teachers: Changing Conceptions of a Career in Teaching," is co-authored by Heather Peske, Edward Liu, Susan Moore Johnson, David Kauffman, and Susan Kardos, all from the Harvard University Graduate School of Education. Based on inter-

views with 50 novice teachers, the authors propose a mixed model for the teaching profession, one that can accommodate people who envision long-term careers as well as those who envision short-term stays.

The authors begin by describing the changing nature of work in contemporary culture, where the notions of a single career or a lifelong employer are anachronistic. Moreover, many new teachers approach teaching tentatively or conditionally, given the demands of the job and the relatively low financial remuneration. Five of the 50 interviewees expected to remain in full-time classroom teaching throughout their careers, another 12 expected to stay indefinitely, but they expected changes of role and responsibility. The rest viewed teaching as one of the many careers that they might have. The authors rightly claim that the next generation of teachers may be more difficult to retain than were previous generations, not so much because of dissatisfaction with their workplace but because people in a host of professions will change jobs over a lifetime. These short-term teachers do indeed “constitute a rich and worthwhile resource” (p. 309). For this to happen, we will need to see change in both the structure of the school and the expectation of administrators and the public.

Of course, the authors also see a crucial place for those who make a lifelong commitment to teaching. In response to data that indicate ambivalence even among those who are making a permanent commitment, the authors recommend changes in school structure and governance. They advocate shifting from a “uniform and horizontal career with few opportunities for variety and challenge” (p. 309) to a more dynamic workplace with “roles as mentors, peer reviewers, professional developers, team leaders and curriculum writers” (p. 310).

During the past decade, the Catholic school community has witnessed the emergence of many programs that provide short-term teachers who live in community. For many, teaching is one step on the way to another career; and the schools benefit mightily from their presence. For some, the experience in the short-term is so positive that they commit themselves in the long term. In either case, Catholic schools have restructured themselves to accommodate these alternative staffing models, and with good results. Peske and her colleagues persuasively argue that the problem is not the presence of short-term teachers in schools but rather schools that cannot take full advantage of the presence of short-term teachers. This is an important lesson for Catholic school leaders to learn.

In the next article, “Teacher Turnover and Teacher Shortages: An Organizational Analysis,” Richard Ingersoll of the University of Pennsylvania builds on a rich review of existing literature to examine staffing problems of schools, specifically the role of school characteristics and organizational conditions in teacher turnover. Unlike Peske et al., Ingersoll sees an inverse relationship between turnover and effectiveness; turnover is dis-

ruptive for the quality of school cohesion and performance. He analyzed anew data from the *1993-1994 School and Staffing Survey* and its supplement, the *Teacher Follow-up Survey*. Not surprisingly, teachers leave for positive reasons—to take better jobs (as measured by salary and prestige)—or for negative reasons—because of deplorable workplace conditions in schools.

Ingersoll maintains that it is important to address organizational sources of low teacher retention, and found that specialty field and age are significant reasons for turnover, but not as conclusive as assumed by previous literature. Also, it found that increasing enrollment and increased retirement are not the primary factors of teacher retention. The problem instead is the manner in which the teachers and schools are managed. This is analyzed on four levels of general organizational satisfaction: increase support from school administration, decrease the number of student discipline problems, increase salaries, and enhance the amount of faculty input on school related decisions. In contrast to the assumption that the low salaries characteristic of the teaching profession cause high dissatisfaction, Ingersoll found that dissatisfaction with the administration of the schools was a higher determinant of turnover than salary concerns in public schools. Private schools have higher rates of turnover despite the fact that teachers in private schools consistently report higher levels of job satisfaction and more positive climates than do teachers in other kinds of schools.

In contrast to popular opinion, Ingersoll found the highest turnover rates do not occur in large, public, urban schools, but in small, private schools. He hypothesizes that, along with salary, turnover is high because of the conflict that results from “a coherent mission, clearly defined values and a tight-knit sense of community” (p. 527). Because small, religious, private institutions are less likely to have formal forums where teachers can voice opposition to these values and norms, there is a higher turnover rate than in public schools where unions and committees allow for that opposition. While this might not be good for teacher retention, it is a good sign of mission effectiveness and philosophical coherence. Low teacher retention can be a curse but it can also be a blessing if the person leaving finds the mission of the school incompatible with her or his personal worldview.

While Peske et al. and Ingersoll differ in methodology and conclusions, one finding emerges clearly: The school needs to question its fundamental structure in order to address staffing needs. How can schools structure themselves to provide quality teachers? First, they must provide teachers with a sense of professional dignity, shared decision making, and creative ways to provide career enhancement without leaving the profession. Second, as one would expect, they must offer decent salary and benefits packages to their employees. Third, they must provide optimal working conditions for “short-termers” as well as “long-termers.” In other words, they must accommodate themselves to the fluidity of professional life in the 21st century. Catholic

schools have long been populated by "short-termers" who sadly are in a workplace designed only for "long-termers."

The next article, written by Franke, Carpenter, Levi, and Fennema, is entitled "Capturing Teachers' Generative Change: A Follow-up Study of Professional Development in Mathematics." The authors attempt to determine how teachers acquire knowledge that can become the basis for continued learning and how teachers use new methods in a way that is generative, (i.e., it enhances teachers' and students' ability to understand familiar subjects in new ways).

The authors conducted an in-depth study of a professional development program called Cognitively Guided Instruction (CGI), a three-year (1990-1993) in-service program for teachers. Four years after this program, 22 first-through fifth-grade teachers in six schools were interviewed and all but two teachers had their classrooms observed during a math lesson. Within two hours of the lesson, the same person who had observed the lesson interviewed the teachers. The observer watched for problems posed by the teacher to the students, interaction between the students and the teacher, and strategies for solving the problems posed by the teacher. The interview consisted of two sets of questions. The first set was similar to those questions raised in the initial training in order to be consistent between the two studies. The second set probed teachers' perceptions of the change that had occurred in his or her teaching style as well as feelings of support from colleagues.

In analyzing interviews and field notes, researchers first looked at the level of engagement with children's thinking. The second time, they looked for patterns of generative growth in teachers. They used a classification scheme to grade each teacher's level of engagement and generative thinking.

Out of the 22 teachers interviewed, all still used some level of the CGI instruction learned. Those teachers who were at the highest level (Level 4) of the scheme had the highest amount of engagement with the students. This meant asking probing questions and questions that were more specific to the class and activity. There were some general differences found between those teachers in the 4 range and those in the 3 or below. The teachers in the 4 structured their lessons more around the frameworks or standards of the school or school system. Level 4 teachers asked more specific questions of the students and probed the students to try to explain their answers. Teachers at Level 3 and below asked more general questions and focused on covering many different ways to solve a problem instead of going into one or two ways in depth. Teachers at Level 4 took instruction from CGI as a starting point and adapted it to meet the needs of their children. Level 3 and below took the information as a fact and used it strictly in their classrooms.

The teachers who took the time to listen to their students' reasoning and prompted the students to think more changed their teaching styles more. They took the information from the questions they asked students and used that as

a way to structure their lessons. Teachers who felt they had support in the school from other teachers were also more willing to adapt information learned in CGI instead of using it verbatim.

Franke and colleagues demonstrate once again that the simple existence of staff development activities is insufficient in itself. Effective staff development has the following characteristics:

1. It engages teachers in their core interests and activities, teaching and learning in the classroom.
2. It does not impart new knowledge from above, but assists teachers in reflecting more deeply on their own experience and knowledge.
3. Its effectiveness is not assessed immediately, but is studied longitudinally.

While the article would be enhanced by a parallel study of gains in student achievement through a more elaborate and multifaceted methodology, it is nonetheless worthwhile. It demonstrates the importance of the three characteristics listed above and it offers practitioners a way to engage in and assess ongoing professional development for teachers.

When it comes to staffing schools, the future is hard to predict and the job market can be mercurial. One thing is certain, however, and is confirmed by the research reviewed here. In private and public schools, for traditionally or alternatively trained teachers, for those who will be in the classroom for a lifetime or for a few years, ongoing high-quality professional development is a *sine qua non*.

REFERENCES

- Franke, M., Carpenter, T. P., Levi, L. W., & Fennema, E. (2001). Capturing teachers' generative change: A follow-up study of professional development in mathematics. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38(3), 653-689.
- Ingersoll, R. (2001). Teacher turnover and teacher shortages: An organizational analysis. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38(3), 499-534.
- Morin, R., & Dean, C. (2001, December 11). Down to basics on teacher certification. *The Washington Post*, p. A-31.
- Peske, H., Liu, Ed., Johnson, S. M., Kauffman, D., & Kardos, S. (2001). The next generation of teachers: Changing conceptions of a career in teaching. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 83(4), 304-311.

Joseph M. O'Keefe, S.J., is associate dean, Lynch School of Education, Boston College. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Rev. Joseph M. O'Keefe, S. J., Lynch School of Education, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA 02467-3813.

Copyright of *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry & Practice* is the property of Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry & Practice and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.