

Year 12 Student Perspectives on Teaching as a Career Review and Conclusions

1.1 Introduction

Schools increasingly are being challenged to adapt to the changing role of the educator and learner, as well as to parental expectations in today's rapidly changing educational landscape. Best practice teaching and learning is at the forefront of this consideration. Teachers are being called upon to respond with agility to new and complex classroom situations, which can create a sense of ambiguity and uncertainty for even the most experienced educators. Technology and in particular student access to technology, has changed the way students learn and communicate (All Schools Education, 2018; Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) 2020; Australian Learning Lecture, 2019; Purcell, 2012). Therefore, schools, policies and the educational environment must adapt in order to meet the needs of the next generation of students. The capacity to respond to these changed imperatives is largely reliant upon the quality and performance of teachers (AITSL, 2015; 2018; 2019; 2020). Attracting talented and committed students to the teaching profession is crucial if schools are to continue to be at the forefront in teaching and preparing future generations for effective participation in a changing society (Weldon, 2015). It follows, therefore, that both the profession itself and the status of the profession must be appealing to passionate, committed and high-calibre

The purpose of this research was to explore the perceptions of Year 12 students from five Catholic secondary schools in Western Australia towards teaching as a career. Specifically, the research reviewed the ways in which Year 12 students perceive teaching as a career, why they perceive teaching in this way, why they might or might not select it as a career and the impact that their school experiences have had on their perceptions of teaching as a career. Foundational to this research is the belief that student perceptions surrounding career choice lead to decisions that manifest in university course preferences and that those perceptions can be influenced (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; 1999; Butcher & Lewis, 2002; Cherry 2016; Démuth, 2013, Hoyle, 2001; Kane & Mallon 2006; Lent, Brown & Hackett, 2002).

1.2 Design of the research

The theoretical framework underpinning this research was predominantly qualitative in nature. Quantitative survey question results were utilised to support qualitative findings. Specifically, the research was based on a constructivist epistemology, with an interpretivist theoretical perspective using a symbolic interactionist lens. The symbolic interactionist lens was appropriate for this study because it emphasised the importance of the interactions between individuals, groups and communities in the process of constructing and attributing meaning to conversations and events and to the forming of perceptions (O'Donoghue, 2007). The methodology employed was an instrumental case study, which aimed to elicit the perceptions of Year 12 students from five Catholic secondary schools towards teaching as a career. These five sites included two single-gender schools, one male and one female, and three co-educational schools, one country school and two metropolitan schools with varying ICSEA scores. The data were gathered from structured online surveys and focus group interviews with Year 12 students, semi-structured interviews with the site's careers counsellor and researcher field notes. In order to explore Year 12 students' perceptions of teaching as a career, three research questions were explored. The three specific research questions were:

1. What are Year 12 student perceptions of teaching as a career?
2. What are the factors that influenced Year 12 student perceptions of teaching as a career?
3. In what ways have school experiences of Year 12 students impacted their perception of teaching as a career?

The Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) interactive model for data management and analysis was utilised to sort, reduce, examine, draw conclusions and verify the conclusions on the data. The three components of this model consist of data reduction, data display and drawing and verifying conclusions (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). An overview of this chapter is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Overview of Chapter: Review and conclusions

- 1.3 Research questions answered
 - 1.3.1 What are Year 12 student perceptions of teaching as a career?
 - 1.3.2 What are the factors that influenced Year 12 student perceptions of teaching as a career?
 - 1.3.3 In what ways have school experiences of Year 12 students impacted their perception of teaching as a career?
 - 1.4 Research conclusions
 - 1.5 Conceptual design: Domains of influence on Year 12 perceptions of teaching as a career
 - 1.6 Knowledge added to the field of study
 - 1.7 Implications for the teaching profession
 - 1.8 Recommendations for the profession
 - 1.9 Further research
 - 1.10 Benefits and limitations of the research
 - 1.11 Conclusion
 - 1.12 Addendum
 - 1.13 Personal impact statement
-

1.3 Research questions answered

1.3.1 What are Year 12 student perceptions of teaching as a career?

The results from the research suggest that Year 12 students from Catholic schools hold a variety of perceptions towards teaching as a career. These perceptions can be grouped into four areas related to the teaching profession. These areas are perceptions on the purpose of teaching, positive

perceptions of teaching as a career, negative perceptions of teaching as a career and perceptions of the status of the teaching profession. These areas will now be summarised.

The depth of the student focus group discussions around the purpose of teaching varied. Some students displayed a deep philosophical, societal and big-picture level of insight on the purpose of teaching. It was common for these students to explore the notion that the purpose of teaching is to shape the future of society and develop well-rounded citizens. Students mentioned that teachers help their students to plan their futures and think about solving current and future world problems. They discussed teachers needing to enrich the whole child, assist with his or her development and enhance wellbeing. Those students who discussed the purpose of teaching more broadly, thought that the ultimate purpose of teaching revolves around developing and improving individuals and communities and advancing societies. Other students focussed on the more immediate and surface-level purpose of teaching and spoke about interactions between the teacher, lesson content and students in the classroom. It was common for these students to discuss teaching as an avenue to pass on knowledge to younger generations and work in a subject area about which they were passionate.

Students expressed various positive perceptions about teaching as a career. They readily identified job satisfaction, potential for impact in the world, holidays, lifestyle and the social nature of teaching as the positive perceptions associated with the profession. When students explored their perception that teaching as a career provides a sense of satisfaction, they touched on topics such as the feelings of fulfilment that accompany helping others to grow and the joy of being able to work in an area of passion and subject interest. They thought that the exposure to multiple interactions and differing opinions of students, staff and parents would be sources of satisfaction. Students perceived that teachers would need to commit to lifelong learning and that this commitment to an ongoing growth process would provide teachers with self-satisfaction and self-actualisation.

Students believed that teaching as a career offered people the potential to have an impact. They identified the ability to shape, guide and motivate children as positive perceptions of teaching. They believed that being part of a

student's life provides teachers with a substantial degree of influence and impact. They positively perceived this influence, and suggested that teachers encourage students to improve themselves, and this ultimately translates to their capacity to make a positive contribution to society. Students referred positively to teachers as potential change agents and acknowledged that teachers have the unique opportunity to influence people to live better lives. These points led the students to positive perceptions of teaching as a career.

Students spoke positively about the holidays and lifestyle associated with a teaching role. They thought that teachers could travel the world and pursue other interests during the extended holiday periods, and that these are positive perceptions of a teaching career. Students imagined that the lifestyle of a teacher allowed for free travel, both world-wide and domestic, through attendance at camps and excursions. They also perceived the variation in daily activities as a positive aspect of a teacher's lifestyle. The stability of a teaching job was discussed in terms of transferability and job security, which students thought were positive and dependable aspects of teaching.

Students perceived teaching to be social in nature. They spoke encouragingly about the numerous and varying relationships that a teacher maintains and engages in. Students thought that maintaining these relationships and being a part of a strong community are points that reflect positively upon their perception of teaching. The number and types of activities, and the subsequent interactions available to a teacher were also raised as attractive perceptions of teaching as a career. The positive perceptions of teaching as a career, besides holidays and lifestyle, tended to cover the altruistic offerings of the profession.

Students also voiced negative perceptions towards teaching as a career. Discussion of these negative perceptions mainly surrounded the nature of the job, student behaviour, the perceived personal traits required of teachers, pay and lifestyle. Students perceived teaching could be a monotonous and repetitive job. They spoke negatively about the undesirable and routine nature of operating under a timetable and administering a set curriculum to a class. Students did not like the idea of leaving school to study and experience the 'real world', only to return to school to be employed. They thought that teachers are structured information providers, whose job entails teaching content related to a

subject or career, rather than actively working in that subject or career. They mentioned that the Internet allows students to access more qualified experts online and that this point makes teaching less specialised and less desirable as a career. Additionally, students mentioned that the lesson preparation, marking and busy nature of a teaching role are unattractive perceptions of the profession.

Dealing with challenging students and managing student behaviours were commonly discussed as unattractive aspects of a teaching career. Students frequently spoke about their experiences of disrespectful behaviours of fellow students towards teachers in the classroom, online and in the yard. They stipulated that the thoughts of tolerating, managing and dealing with disrespectful student behaviour creates negative perceptions of a career in teaching. Students noted that they would not want to deal with students on a daily basis who do not want to learn, and that this reality makes them perceive teaching less favourably. In a similar manner, students also identified that they perceived teachers required certain personality traits in order to be successful at behaviour management and teaching. They commonly noted patience, the need for control and emotional mastery as necessary teacher traits and suggested that these qualities allow teachers to effectively deal with challenging student behaviours and parental demands. Some students perceived a misalignment between these traits and their own personality traits, which led to a negative perception of teaching as a career.

A number of students vocalised negativity about the capped financial structure and remuneration level associated with teaching. They also suggested that the long hours, effort, and dedication required of teachers does not result in an adequate monetary reward. Students said that a teaching lifestyle consisting of after-hours, time away from family, marking and preparing lessons takes considerable effort without additional compensation through overtime pay or time off in lieu. Furthermore, students mentioned that as the pay is capped, there is little opportunity for earning additional money. Students also mentioned that they considered teaching lacked opportunity for upward mobility, promotion and career progression and these factors generate negative perceptions of the profession.

Students revealed diverse, and sometimes contradictory perceptions of the status of teaching. These perceptions ranged widely from low to medium to high status. Moreover, in some cases students perceived teaching to transcend status judgements altogether. They suggested that teaching is a stand-alone profession with a societal identity as a role model or caretaker. Female participants were more likely than males to consider teaching as a higher status career. When students indicated an intention to select teaching as a career, they were more likely to attribute a higher status to teaching than those who indicated that they have no intention of selecting teaching as a career. Students who studied the higher-level Mathematics and Physics courses were more likely to consider teaching to be of a lower status than those not studying these courses. The school with the lowest ICSEA had the highest percentage of students agreeing with the statement 'teaching is a high-status career'. Conversely, the school with the highest ICSEA had the lowest percentage of students agreeing with the statement 'teaching is a high-status career'.

The students who perceived teaching to be a medium to high status career attributed this judgement to the fact that teachers help their students to undertake all other high-status professions. This point led them to think that teachers have a medium to high status. Students also identified that the age group of students being taught is directly proportional to the perceived status of the profession. For example, students indicated that they perceive primary school teaching to have a lower-status and high school teaching to have a higher-status. Students who attributed a low status to the teaching profession noted the low ATAR requirement for university entrance to education, low pay, large number of teachers in the workforce and their own personal experiences with incompetent teachers. A number of students perceived teaching to be exempt from social status judgements. They articulated their perception that teachers hold a place or identity in society, similar to that of a mother or priest. Moreover, they suggested that teachers play a role in the formation of all other professions. Students noted that teachers are more likely to be judged on social skills, relational qualities and their ability to help students meet these future academic professional goals, rather than wealth and social status. For these reasons, a number of students perceived teachers to stand alone, exempt from professional status judgements.

1.3.2 What are the factors that influenced Year 12 student perceptions of teaching as a career?

The factors that influenced Year 12 student perceptions of teaching as a career were considered under two broad headings: student identified influences and careers counsellor identified influences. Students repeatedly identified school-related experiences as the greatest influence upon their perception of teaching. Students commonly cited conversations with parents and friends, university requirements, remuneration and the media as common influences on their perceptions of teaching as a career. Careers counsellors frequently named parental expectations and aspirations, the academic ability of the student, remuneration, media and community and teacher expectations as the top influences on student perceptions of teaching as a career.

Students spoke about the influence that parents and friends have had over their perception of teaching as a career. When considering parental influence, students mentioned that parents frequently push their children to the careers with the highest possible outcomes. Many students, notably those who were high achievers or had parents as teachers, reflected that their parents encouraged them to aim for occupations with a higher status, such as medicine, law and engineering. Such encouragement caused them to discount teaching as a career option. Other students commented that their parents would be happy for them to become teachers, which made them look favourably on the profession. Some students identified that hearing their parents criticise teachers made them think poorly of joining the profession. Students thought that their friends' opinions generally influenced their career perceptions. When asked to reflect specifically on teaching, a number responded that their friends would question their 'goodness of fit' for the profession, in terms of their personality. Students identified these types of comments from friends as either negative or positive influencers on their perceptions of teaching as a career.

Students frequently spoke about the negative impact of the ATAR requirement and remuneration for teaching on their perception of teaching as a career. Students interpreted the relatively low ATAR entry to mean that the occupation is easy to get into and not particularly difficult or specialised in terms of skills or knowledge. Some students also linked the ATAR requirement to the

notion that teaching does not have high remuneration. Generally, these students had negative perceptions of teaching as a career. Conversely, those students who commented favourable on the remuneration mostly had positive perceptions of teaching as a career.

Students spoke about the negative influence that the media has upon their perceptions of teaching as a career. The media included film, television and online videos and memes. Students felt that teachers are mainly framed as mean, odd and funny characters in the media and that this characterisation resonates and stays with viewers because most people have experienced such a teacher at some point. One student mentioned heart-warming movies about the impact of an inspirational teacher and said that these films likely create positive perceptions of teaching as a career.

Careers counsellors predominantly identified parents and their expectations and aspirations for their children as the main influences on student perceptions of teaching as a career. Generally, careers counsellors indicated that parental approval of an occupation led to the students having a positive perception of the career. It was noted that parental expectations were linked to the parents' level of education and occupational status, and the child's academic achievement. The careers counsellors from schools with a lower ICSEA indicated that there was either a positive or little to no stigma associated with choosing teaching, particularly when the child was not an academically high achiever. The careers counsellors from the communities with a higher ICSEA generally noted that parents held more negative views of teaching as a career choice for their child, even when the perception of teachers and their roles was positive. This was particularly true for students who were academically high achieving.

Two careers counsellors noted that students typically tried to aim for occupations with the highest possible pay and status. They suggested that students' academic ability influences their perception of teaching as a career. They indicated that the higher the students' achievement the more likely they are to look at university courses with higher ATAR requirements. The careers counsellors suggested that students do not look favourably upon selecting teaching when they have the option to apply for courses deemed more difficult to enter. They proposed that students' high results indicate their capability and

capacity to achieve, and that a high ATAR university entrance requirement suggests the course requires people with strong academic ability. Students viewed favourably the prestige of the high ATAR requirement, which translates to positive perceptions of the occupation. The careers counsellors indicated that this logic translated to a negative perception of teaching as a career choice for high achieving students.

All of the careers counsellors mentioned that the remuneration of an occupation influences student perceptions. This fact was particularly true for male students. Generally, careers counsellors thought that the remuneration associated with teaching negatively impacted student perceptions of the career.

Four of the careers counsellors indicated that the media, specifically television, influences student perceptions of career choice. They explained that many shows romanticise professions such as the police force, detectives, lawyers, fashion designers, nurses and doctors. All four careers counsellors stated that this romanticising makes those professions more appealing. They pointed out that very few, if any, shows on television create idealised or glorified versions of the teaching profession. The absence of this media influence draws students' attention away from teaching as a career and towards those professions that are framed as exciting. One counsellor also conceded that this framing is only possible because the students have no experience of those careers, and that a certain mystique is lost in teaching because students witness teachers at work in the classroom.

The careers counsellors noted that community and individual teacher expectations influence student's perceptions of career choice. They indicated that if the community had high or low expectations in terms of academic achievement, university or TAFE course selection and remuneration then this directly translated to the students' perceptions of career choice. This influence was identified for communities who expected students to consider apprenticeships and trades as the norm as much as it was for communities who expected students to aim for a career in the most prestigious professions. All careers counsellors addressed the significant influence of individual teachers. Careers counsellors indicated that a teacher's encouragement can have a substantial impact on student career-related perceptions and decision-making. This point was particularly true when the teacher was passionate about

teaching his or her subject and had a good relationship with the student. One careers counsellor questioned whether teachers realise just how big an influence they can have upon students' perceptions of career choice.

1.3.3 In what ways have school experiences of Year 12 students impacted their perception of teaching as a career?

School related experiences were clearly identified as the top influencer of student perceptions of teaching as a career. The results are presented in terms of student experiences with teachers and student experiences with other students. The positive experiences with teachers all translated into positive perceptions of teaching as a career. Students spoke about the positive influence of seeing good practitioners in action. They frequently used the words enthusiastic, passionate, helpful and happy to describe teachers who positively influenced their perceptions of teaching as a career. Students felt drawn to exploring a career in teaching when they encountered staff who appeared to incorporate teaching into their self-identity. They explained that seeing someone care so much about, and get great enjoyment out of a job, made them think they would like to consider teaching as a career. Students also felt that the caring relationships they experienced with teachers made them think positively about a career in the profession. They valued the relationships and suggested that they would like the opportunity to replicate the relationships again, as the teacher. Finally, students identified that few teachers actively encourage students to consider a career in the profession. However, students added that when a teacher did encourage a student to become a teacher, for example because of a personality fit, then this encouragement positively influenced his or her perception of teaching as a career.

Negative experiences with teachers have a significant impact upon student perceptions of teaching as a career. Students commonly spoke about the negative influence of angry, moody, lazy and grumpy teachers, and poor classroom practitioners. They suggested these types of teachers damage their perception of teaching as a career. Students interpreted that the teacher's bad mood or poor classroom practice may be directly related to a lack of enjoyment derived from being a teacher. Students also noted that even if they wanted to be a teacher, having to work alongside such colleagues would make them

reconsider their career options. Conversely, some students noted that these negative experiences motivated them to consider teaching as a profession to ensure future students did not have the same experiences.

Students noted that witnessing various negative aspects of a teacher's role changed their perception of teaching for the worse. They mentioned that seeing teachers dealing with unreasonable parental complaints, deliver a crowded and regimented syllabus, having a lack of support from administration for dealing with disrespectful students, being held responsible for disengaged students' results and adhering to beliefs that appear to not align with their own, all added to a negative perception of teaching as a career.

Students experiences with their peers were mentioned as both positive and negative influences on student perceptions of teaching as a career. The positive experiences of other students centred around seeing teachers help fellow students grow, change and improve. Positive and fruitful student interactions and relationships also influenced students to consider teaching as a favourable profession. Students frequently identified poor student behaviour and disrespectful communications and interactions as points that impact negatively upon the profession. Seeing troubled or bored students disrupting the teacher, class and the learning were points of negativity for some students. They suggested that as adults, they would not want to be around this type of behaviour continually, which negatively impacted their perception of teaching.

1.4 Conceptual design: The influences on student perceptions of teaching as a career

As a result of this study, the researcher proposes a conceptual design for understanding the domains of influence on student perceptions of teaching as a career. The domains of influence are categorised as public, school, home and the nature of a teacher's role. The influences described in each of the quadrants are the areas that have the potential, under certain circumstances, to positively or negatively impact student perceptions of teaching as a career. There are certain experiences in each domain that appeared to always render positive student perceptions of teaching as a career. The most notable of these experiences came from the school domain and included the experience of being in a positive, supportive and encouraging school environment and having

enthusiastic, passionate, helpful and happy teachers. The conceptual design is intended to cover broad domains of influence as outlined in this study and as such, the potential for further research may determine that these domains can be generalised and applied to other educational systems and countries.

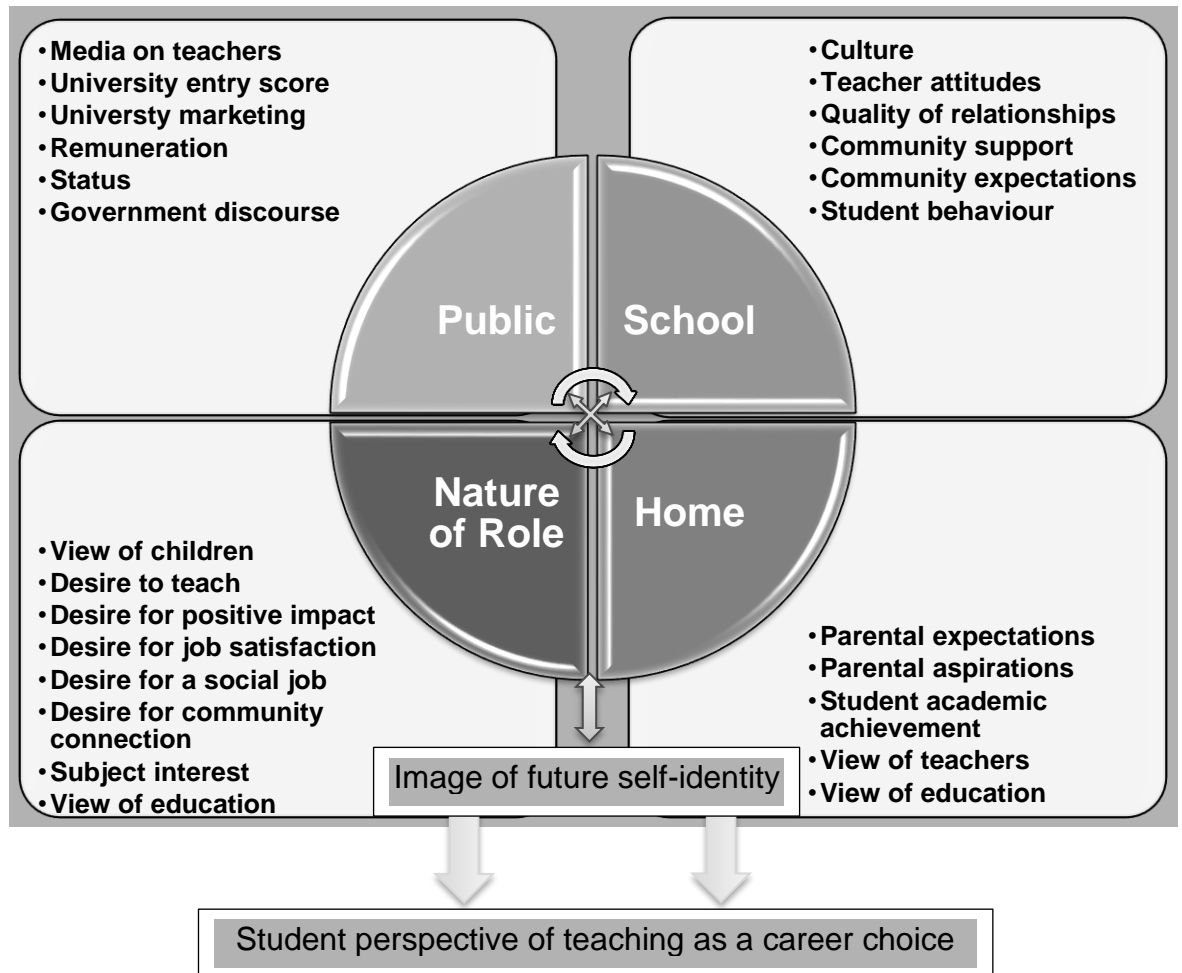


Figure 1.1 Conceptual design: Domains of influence on Year 12 student perspectives of teaching as a career

1.5 Knowledge added to the field of study

The research revealed eight possible additions to the existing body of published literature pertaining to student perceptions of teaching as a career. However, this study is highly contextualised and therefore it is recommended that these additions are subjected to further investigation. The research has revealed the domains of influence that impact upon student perceptions of teaching as: home, school, public and the role of a teacher. The research

uncovered the characteristics within these domains, which may increase the likelihood of positively or negatively influencing perceptions of teaching as a career. However, the study also revealed that student perceptions are formed in the interplay or interaction between the individual and these domains, along with his or her imagined future self. The individual is not separate from his or her experiences within the different domains. Rather, he or she makes his or her own sense of these experiences.

A number of students perceived schools to be places that provide many citizens with employment and keep students occupied. Whilst this point is universally true, it was not listed in the literature as a purpose of the teaching profession. Interestingly, the place of schools and teachers in society has been recently highlighted as countries shut-down due to the COVID-19 pandemic and accompanying isolation restrictions. The movement out of isolation was reliant upon schools re-opening so that parents could return to work instead of staying at home to care for and home-school their children.

The impact that teachers have upon student perceptions of teaching was well documented in the literature. However, the impact of the culture of a school and the purposeful and vocal revering and valuing of teachers by leaders and teachers within the school, was not evident in the literature. This study revealed these points to have a positive impact on perceptions of the teaching profession. The opposite also appeared true. Where the school did not have a culture that positively promoted teaching and teachers this generally resulted in a more negative perception of teaching as a career. The study identified that schools that visibly and verbally appreciate teachers and the teaching profession positively impact student perceptions of teaching as a career.

Teachers who encourage students to consider teaching as a career have a positive impact on student perceptions of teaching. This finding was supported by the research literature. An extension of this point was revealed in the study. Some schools deliberately did not encourage students towards careers because they did not want to influence students, while other schools purposefully encouraged students towards or away from various pathways. The students in the schools that purposefully influenced student perceptions appeared to have a better idea of what they wanted to do post school. It was apparent in this study that the lack of guidance and encouragement towards

any pathway, generally led to some students not having a clear direction towards post-school goals. Moreover, no student identified the careers program within their school as having an influence or impact on their career-related perceptions, goal setting and decision-making.

It is well documented that parents directly influence their children. It was evident in this study that students who actively created future visions of their career with their parents, appeared more goal-driven and vocalised their desire to move towards a particular career-direction. The students with a future vision were able to readily identify whether teaching as a career would or would not allow them to fulfil this future vision. The significance of a future vision, co-created with parents, has not been addressed in the literature on student perceptions of teaching.

The significance of the collegiality among teachers was not presented in the literature on perceptions of teaching as a career. In this study, student perceptions of choosing teaching as a career included a consideration of desirable colleagues and peers at work. Teachers' visible relationships with other teachers have a role in influencing student perceptions of teaching as a career. Generally, students who experienced teachers enjoying each other's company and displaying collegial comradery, resulted in positive perceptions of teaching. Students who witnessed negative interactions and colder collegial relationships, generally translated these experiences to negative perceptions of teaching as a career. Teachers' who visibly display their professional relationships with colleagues have a positive influence on student perceptions of teaching.

The literature confirmed that poor teacher-student relationships and negative experiences with teachers generally led to students having a negative perception of teaching. This study revealed that, at times, these negative experiences and poor relationships can be a motivational force that ultimately draws people towards the profession. The underlying motivation was connected to the desire to be a change agent. Students thought they would like to return to school as teachers and take responsibility for bettering student outcomes. Without these negative experiences, some people may not have had the drive to enter teaching, and perhaps lead educational change and reform.

Finally, the results of the study suggested that some students see teachers as providers of an essential community service, inherently linked to the structure of society. They concluded that because teachers hold this essential place within society, the profession is exempt from the normal social status related judgements. Students likened teachers to mothers, fathers and priests to explain their understanding of this social status exemption. Interestingly, teachers were among the first to be called 'essential workers' in the latest COVID-19 pandemic. The governments returned the teaching profession to work in the first phases of re-opening the countries, post isolation. Therefore, recognising teachers as 'essential workers' within society.

1.6 Implications for the profession

The results of this research have implications for the following six groups. These implications will be discussed under each group.

1. Federal and State Government: Education ministers
2. AITSL
3. Education sector leaders and unions in Western Australia
4. Universities
5. Schools
6. Other researchers

The results of this research have relevance for both the State and Federal Governments in Australia. The status of teaching in society is an area of interest for our state and federal education ministers. In 2019 the members of the Parliament of Australia (2019) conducted an inquiry into the status of the teaching profession. Some of the issues included media representation of teachers, concern over the social status of the teaching profession, recruitment and retention of teachers, projected teacher shortages, particularly in the specialist areas of Mathematics and Physics, teacher wellbeing and burnout, early career teacher attrition, gender imbalances and university entrance requirements were some of the issues that were identified for the profession through the Parliamentary Inquiry (2019). The federal and state education ministers have a role in protecting and promoting the public image of the teaching profession. It is vital that these bodies understand the complexities of

student perceptions surrounding teaching as a career and the influences upon those perceptions.

This research is relevant for those leaders and personnel at AITSL who are responsible for representing and promoting the profession and leading its professionalisation. One of the major purposes of AITSL is to cater for the needs of current and future teachers and school leaders. Therefore, this research has implications for AITSL as the insight provided by students may assist AITSL to deliver on its core purposes.

This research has relevance for the education system leaders in Western Australia, who oversee Western Australian schools and the education unions who advocate for and represent the interest of teachers. This study is particularly relevant for CEWA, considering all the participants were enrolled in Catholic schools. However, given that the place of Catholic religious beliefs was not identified by the students as a significant influence on their perceptions of teaching, the results may also be of use to the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia (AISWA) and the Department of Education system leaders. Among other duties, the leaders of these three education sectors and the education unions have a responsibility to manage and contribute to the media discourse surrounding teaching, policy development, and promotion of the profession, lobbying and advocating for teachers, the profession's public image and succession planning for teachers in schools.

This study has implications for the personnel in universities responsible for marketing, recruitment, course enrolment and course development. Universities historically exist as institutions for knowledge creation, distribution and transfer. They are charged with preparing students to take up roles in various industries. One of these industries is education. Students in this study identified the types of teachers who have a positive impact on student perceptions. The universities are in a prime position to not only recruit, but to thoroughly train pre-service teachers so that they are ready to enter the teaching workforce with the appropriate attitude and learning experiences. Furthermore, university staff need to understand the critical role they have in influencing the perceptions of pre-service teachers through their own teaching.

Universities offer students enrolments in their institutions and work to attract, recruit and retain students. The results of this research have particular

relevance to those universities who offer teaching degrees. Many students commented that the low ATAR and university requirements for teaching influences their perceptions about the desirability and status of the teaching profession. They also suggested that universities are seen to promote other degrees more rigorously than teaching such as commerce, engineering, medicine and law. The results of this study may contribute to an explanation of how universities have a role in shaping the current perception of teaching as a career. Moreover, this explanation may help universities to investigate their responsibilities for the promotion of the status of the profession in society, through entry requirements and other creative measures. Offering alternate pathways into teaching may impact upon the perception of teaching as a career, and it is therefore recommended that universities consider the implications of programs such as these.

The research has implications for schools and every teacher employed in the schools, regardless of the system, subject or year. The findings of the research revealed that schools and teachers are the prime force in determining student perceptions of teaching as a career. The research revealed that students see teachers' words and actions on display every day. Hence, it is a teacher's responsibility to know and understand that what he or she says and does translates to a perception in their students about the teaching profession. This research did not intend to return information on the role of the careers counsellors in schools. However, it cannot be ignored that the students in this study did not deem the careers counsellor as a significant influencer on student perceptions. This point has implications for the career planning programs in schools.

The results of this research have implications for those researchers who are interested in the teaching profession and perceptions of teaching. The study provides a basis for seven areas of suggested further research. The suggested research includes replicating the research in other systems, with different aged students, perhaps with longitudinal analysis; the tension between teaching as a vocation and the professionalisation of teaching; the impact of the media on the profession; recruitment of teachers for faith-based schools; why teachers and careers counsellors rarely promote teaching to students; the impact and

influence of careers counsellors; and further study into the proposed conceptual design. These areas of research will be discussed after the recommendations.

1.7 Recommendations for the profession

In light of the results of the study, nine recommendations for the profession are presented.

Recommendation One. Federal and state ministers for education, universities and education system leaders create public and extensive marketing campaigns and initiatives to draw attention to the benefits of entering the teaching profession. Strategies might include an expansion of the current nationally recognised awards in the field of education, and an increase in the marketing of these award winners. These three groups might use their influence and available media channels to promote positive public discourse on the teaching profession.

Recommendation Two. AITSL and universities work together to lobby for higher and more prestigious entry standards and a higher ATAR requirement for teaching degrees in Australia.

Recommendation Three. Unions, education sector leaders and AITSL advocate for education policy adjustments that address the undesirable issues associated with teaching, such as workloads, overtime, increasing compliance and managing disrespectful student behaviour. Furthermore, these bodies should consider lobbying for greater autonomy for teachers in the classroom, a reduction in face-to-face contact hours and an increase in preparation and professional learning time.

Recommendation Four. Universities and education sector leaders create recruitment initiatives that include promoting education as a desirable career choice. Both groups of leaders work with schools to identify prospective teachers and offer awards, mentoring, acceleration programs and scholarships to entice identified high school age students into teaching. Extensive and targeted recruitment strategies are devised by these organisations to attract

appropriate high school age students towards a career in the areas of projected teacher shortage. Examples include attracting high-achieving Mathematics and Physics students into specialist Mathematics and Physics teaching and males into primary school teaching.

Recommendation Five. Education sector leaders influence the relevant school curriculum and standards authorities in each state to develop and initiate Year 11 and 12 ATAR courses in educational psychology or teaching. These courses may provide high school students with insights into teaching and may act as pre-cursors to selecting an education-related course at university.

Recommendation Six. Universities review entry requirements for education courses and, if not already doing so, consider applying psychometric testing to ensure future entrants have the necessary skills for building and maintaining positive relationships with students, parents and colleagues. Additionally, universities examine their pre-service teacher courses to ensure there are adequate experiences and learning opportunities to allow students to develop and nurture passion, helpfulness, happiness with career choice and a sense of enthusiasm towards a teaching career. Universities review course units to include greater emphasis on behavioural and group psychology, neuroscience for understanding student brain function and behaviour, innovation, design thinking and technology within the courses. Moreover, pre-service teachers are formally encouraged to assess their suitability to teaching at key points during the course. Universities raise the awareness amongst teaching graduates that their vocal loyalty to the profession has a positive impact on student perceptions of teaching as a career.

Recommendation Seven. Education sector leaders and schools deliver professional learning to teaching staff on: Year 12 perceptions of teaching as a career; the importance of good relationships with students and other staff; the importance and necessity of vocal loyalty to their profession; and the impact of discouraging or encouraging students in relation to teaching as a career. In order to achieve this, education sector leaders request that school leaders and

teachers adopt a purposeful discourse in public forums and assemblies surrounding the value of teachers and their importance in society.

Recommendation Eight. Schools proactively develop media relationships and provide these media personnel with news-worthy items pertaining to their schools and teachers. Schools maintain, and education personnel are encouraged to create, active social media accounts to share successes and good news stories about teachers, students and the school.

Recommendation Nine. Schools conduct an audit of the effectiveness and influence of current careers programs within schools. This audit is used to ensure school staff, students and parents develop and regularly track explicit career-related goals for students, in a three-way partnership, particularly in senior years.

1.8 Further research

The study provides a basis for seven areas of suggested further research. First, the research could be replicated in other sectors in Western Australia, nationally or internationally. Second, researchers interested in studying the tension and complementary aspects of the vocational nature of teaching and the professionalisation of teaching may find this study useful as a foundational and contextual basis for their research. Third, the results of this study could act as a stimulus for those interested in exploring the impact of the media on the perception and status of the teaching profession. Fourth, this research could be extended to investigate the place of teaching in society. This suggestion is particularly pertinent given the recent changes to education and teaching due to the Covid-19 lock down and the growing necessity of access to remote teaching.

Fifth, this research has identified that teachers and careers counsellors rarely promote teaching as a career. This point appeared particularly true for students from schools with higher ICSEA scores. Researchers interested in investigating the accuracy of this phenomenon would benefit from the findings of this study. Sixth, this study revealed that student perceptions of teaching were not significantly influenced by careers counsellors and careers programs.

The results of this study may be useful for those researchers who are interested in the impact and influence of careers counsellors and career programs. Finally, those researchers interested in student perceptions of teachers could test the developed conceptual design for the domains of influence (Figure 1.1) with other year groups. This further study could help to ascertain the similarities and differences in perceptions of teaching and influences on perceptions between primary, middle and high school students and contexts.

1.9 Benefits and limitations of the research

The benefits of this research extend to teacher recruitment, training, elevating the status of the teaching profession and it offers an addition of student voice to the body of knowledge on perceptions of teaching as a career. The listed recommendations may assist with attracting and recruiting high-performing students to the profession. Furthermore, this recruitment may be tailored to target areas of projected teacher shortage. The relevant bodies may actively and positively influence the public discourse around the profession. The results of this study may assist these bodies to redress the negative perceptions and promote the positive perceptions of teaching. Influencing public discourse in this manner may help to elevate the status of teaching in society. Given the limited nature of the literature on the topic of Year 12 student perceptions towards teaching as a career, this research has the potential to provide a valuable addition of student voice to the existing understanding of the topic.

There are three factors that may limit the scope of this research study, as presented in Chapter One. The research is confined to five Catholic secondary schools in Western Australia and therefore generalising the findings to other jurisdictions within Australia or internationally may be problematic. The study only considers student perceptions and careers counsellor opinions and not parents, teachers and other influencing parties. The researcher's experience working in and attending Catholic schools provided insight into student perspectives and a knowledge of the culture of the schools. However, the researcher also anticipated that her background could influence interpretations and accepted that without due reflection, personal bias may unconsciously appear. To mitigate this limitation a three-point data triangulation was used to test the themes and findings and the researcher examined and recorded her

own interest and motivations towards the topic, as a means of consciously avoiding bias.

1.10 Conclusion

This study was concerned with the exploration of perceptions of Year 12 students from five Catholic schools in Western Australia towards teaching as a career choice. The aim of the research was to reveal these perceptions, the reasons for the perceptions and the people, places and experiences that influenced the perceptions. In identifying the perceptions and in the deconstruction of the influences upon the perceptions, the study hoped to provide insights that would enable the profession to attract, recruit and retain passionate and high achieving students. Attracting, recruiting and retaining these candidates, will serve to sustain the succession of the teaching profession and will help schools and society to flourish into the unforeseeable and unpredictable future.

The study has returned the conclusion that Year 12 student perceptions of teaching as a career are multiple and varied. As such, attracting prospective students to consider teaching as a viable career choice remains a complex undertaking. An individual's perception is intimately connected to his or her experiences in different contexts over time and his or her sense of self and future self. Positive perceptions of teaching are more likely to occur under certain circumstances, such as in a flourishing school culture where teachers are valued, supportive teacher-student relationships exist, and media discourse promotes teachers and education. Negative perceptions of teaching are more likely to occur under certain circumstances, such as when teacher-student relations are strained, parents and peers do not support teachers or education and the media frames education or teachers in an undesirable manner. The research has confirmed the central place that the individual, his or her personality, interpretation of reality and vision for their future-self play in the construction of perceptions. The study has also revealed that students are not separate from the contexts in which they are placed and the experiences they have. However, on an individual level, interplay exists between the interactions, interpretations and influences within these contexts and experiences. Therefore, a student's perceptions of teaching as a career are reciprocally determined.

1.11 Addendum

This research has already had an impact. In 2020 I wrote the feature article published in Edition 1; Volume 23 of the *Professional Educator* titled “Are teachers really Crocodiles? Perception is reality by default or by design.” In 2023, my journal article ‘*Attracting talented and committed students to the teaching profession. Student perspectives on teaching as a career was*’ accepted and approved for publication in the International Q1 Journal *Teaching and Teacher Education*. It will be published in the next edition of Teaching and Teacher Education.

Further, the results of the study were summarised and submitted as a reference paper to the Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia. This Parliamentary Inquiry was titled ‘status of the teaching profession in Australia’ and was conducted in 2019. Additionally, the results of the research were presented by the researcher at the Western Australian Institute for Educational Research conference in August 2019 and 2021.

Following the Covid-19 disruption to schools and society, two Principals, one from a Catholic school and one from an independent school, expressed an interest in reading the results of this research in relation to student perceptions of the purpose of teaching and the literature review on the purpose of schools in society. A copy of the literature review and the discussion chapters were sent to both Principals via email. Both Principals used these chapters as data sources to consider the future opportunities for their schools.

1.12 Personal impact statement

Conducting this research has had a significant impact on me. The inspiration for the study came from my immense enjoyment and sense of fulfillment from teaching as a career, coupled with background knowledge and experience in sales and marketing. I felt that governments, universities, education sectors and schools were doing very little to expose students to the satisfaction, fulfillment and career opportunities associated with entering the profession. The influence of this exposure was particularly absent during the process of career discernment. I believed it was necessary for the profession to have greater representation in the form of recruitment advocates. These

advocates would hopefully attract passionate and inspired people to the profession, to help shape the future of society through teaching.

This research has enabled me to understand the impact of schools, school cultures and teachers upon students, their learning, and the forming of perceptions. The insight gleaned has been immeasurably useful when investigating school improvement practices. As a Deputy Principal of Teaching and Learning in a large and busy secondary College, the process of conducting this research has helped me to lead teams to explore and understand grass-root issues within my own school and system. I then used this understanding with the teams to develop and implement solutions in the form of initiatives and projects, in a methodologically rigorous manner. The realisations I gained from the results of the study and the experience of completing the Doctor of Philosophy degree has further inspired me to continue to have a positive impact in this world, by advocating for teachers and working to elevate the place of the teaching profession in our society.

Reference List

- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1977). "Toward an Experimental Ecology of Human Development." *American Psychologist* 32 (7): 513–531.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1994). "Ecological Models of Human Development." In T. Husten and T. Postlethwaite (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of Education* 3 (2) (pp.1643–1647). New York: Elsevier Science.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1999). Environments in Developmental Perspective: Theoretical and Operational Models. In S.Friedman and T. Wachs (Eds.), *Measuring Environment across the Life Span: Emerging Methods and Concepts* (pp.3-28). Washington DC: American Psychological Association Press.
- Butcher, J., & Lewis, E. (2002). Why not teaching? Senior students have their say. Paper presented at the *Australian Association for Research in Education Conference*, Brisbane.
- Cherry, K. (2016). *Perception and the perceptual process*. Retrieved from <https://www.verywell.com/perception-and-the-perceptual-process-2795839>
- Démuth, A. (2013). *Perception theories*. Retrieved from [http://fff.truni.sk/userdata/ebooks/demuth_perception_theories%20\(1.1\).pdf](http://fff.truni.sk/userdata/ebooks/demuth_perception_theories%20(1.1).pdf)
- Hoyle, E. (2001). Teaching prestige, status and esteem. *Educational Management and Administration*, 29(2), 139-152. doi:10.1177/0263211x010292001
- Hoyle, E. (2008). Changing Conceptions of Teaching as a Profession: Personal Reflections. *Teaching: Professionalization, Development and Leadership*, 285-304. doi:10.1007/978-1-4020-8186-6_19
- Kane, R. & Mallon, M. (2006). *Perceptions of teachers and teaching*. Retrieved from https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0015/7710/Perceptions-of-Teachers-and-TeachingAccess.pdf
- Lent, R.W., Brown, S.D., Hackett, G. (2002). *Career Choice and Development. Social Cognitive Career Theory*. P255-302. Retrieved from <http://www.borbelytiborbors.extra.hu/ZSKF/CareerDevelopment.pdf#page=276>
- Miles, M., Huberman, M., & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative Data Analysis. A Methods Sourcebook*. Thousand Oakes CA, Sage.
- O'Donoghue, T. (2007). *Planning your qualitative research project: An introduction to interpretivist research in education*. New York: Routledge.