

Why Teacher Education?

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Abstract

This study investigated students' reasons for enrolling in Bachelor of Education courses at a time when the employment prospects for teachers in Halifax are poor. Study participants were first-year students in the Bachelor of Education program at Mount Saint Vincent University. 85 students were surveyed regarding their reasons for becoming teachers, their knowledge of the economic prospects for teachers in regards to employment, their knowledge of the Halifax Regional School Board's teaching system and any advantages they perceived they had over others in gaining employment. The results of the survey were statistically analysed in order to explore the relationships between the four areas of knowledge. The results of the analyses revealed very few significant connections – leading to two key conclusions; firstly, students' reasons for becoming teachers remain quite separate from their knowledge of the teaching labor market, and secondly, there is a lack of comprehensive research done by students prior to enrolling. Findings of the study are discussed in relation to the implications for students, the implications for the teaching labor market and the implications for individuals affected by the current oversupply of teachers in Halifax.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

There is an undeniable surplus of teachers in Nova Scotia. In 2012 the Department of Education published a report that showed that the annual supply of newly certified teachers far-outweighs the annual demand (*NS Teacher Supply and Demand*, 2012). The effects of such an oversupply, in conjunction with the seniority-based hiring system of the Halifax Regional School Board has a devastating effect on new graduate teachers in Halifax. New teachers can face years of unpredictable and unreliable work, and will experience fierce competition for that work.

A reasonable solution would be to reduce the number of newly certified teachers each year, giving the market a chance to absorb the current oversupply. One of the means to this solution is the education of students before they make decisions about their higher education, with the goal of encouraging a voluntary decline in enrolments in the BEd programs. However in order to provide effective education and information that is meaningful to students and in order to determine if this would even make a difference, we must first learn how much they already know. What do they know about the economic prospects for new teachers? What do they know about the policies and practices of the HRSB? Do they perceive they have an advantage that renders all other information meaningless?

The poor economic prospects for teachers have been widely publicised in the media. Yet despite this, the Department of Education report shows that since 2010

applications for Education programs in Nova Scotia have only marginally declined overall, and in the case of Acadia University have even increased. Another question to consider is; does a student's desire to become a teacher overrule any concerns they may have about their economic prospects?

In order to contribute in part to a solution to the current oversupply of teachers in Halifax this study attempts to answer the afore mentioned questions in conjunction with the primary research question; why are a significant number of students enrolling in teacher education programs at a time when the employment prospects for teachers in Halifax are so poor?

Chapter 2. Literature Review

Reasons for Wanting to Become a Teacher

“The reasons entering teacher candidates cite for their decisions to enroll in teacher preparation programs and, ultimately, to become teachers form a much studied cluster of variables” (Brookhart & Freeman, 1992. p. 46).

There is a large amount of literature on students’ reasons for wanting to become teachers and the five studies reviewed here were chosen due to their relevancy and the reoccurring themes that arose in their results despite their different systems of categorization. Three of the studies were completed in the last twelve years, and the other two were completed in the early nineties. Four of the studies took place in North America and one took place in Europe. Each study investigated almost exclusively students’ reasons for choosing teaching as a career. Identification of the common themes across these studies played an important role in shaping the research tool for this study.

In a study on the ‘Motivations for the career choices of pre-service teachers in New South Wales, Australia and Ontario, Canada’ Sumison (2000) interviewed 40 pre-service teachers in Canada and Australia regarding the reasons behind their career choices. While this study is unique in comparison to the others in that Sumison was interested in the cross cultural results, her method for categorizing the results is comprehensive and provides a useful framework when considering the results of other studies. Sumison argues that categorization systems used in previous studies are over

simplified and do not allow for a thorough interpretation of results. "... The dichotomous intrinsic – extrinsic categorization underpinning many studies of prospective teachers' motivations is likely to cloud our understanding of the complexity of reasons for pursuing a teaching career" (Sumison, 2000, p.15). Instead Sumison develops a continuum of motivations, with personal agency as the basis for the continuum. She states, "... It offers a more developed, and more flexible, conceptual framework for exploring pre-service teachers' motivations for teaching that might usefully inform future studies" (Sumison, 2000, p. 15-16).

The results of Sumison's research are grouped in four categories along the personal agency continuum. "(1) Little sense of personal agency (e.g. teaching by default or chance); (2) teaching as a means of gaining personal agency; (3) teaching as a means of assisting others to gain agency; and (4) self as a reform agent" (Sumison, 2000, p.1). Sumison sorts her results further by creating sub groups within these four categories. For example, within the third category 'teaching as a means of assisting others to gain agency' are the sub groups 'to make a difference in children's lives' and 'to contribute to society' (Sumison, 2000, p.8). It is difficult to find a 'reason' that does not fit appropriately into Sumison's continuum, as is demonstrated below in the review of other similar studies. The significance of Sumison's conceptual framework in regards to designing a research tool for this study is that through her framework it is possible to identify the most common themes across the research while ensuring that the vast majority of possible results are allowed for.

Of the 40 pre-service teachers that Sumison (2000) interviewed the majority fell into either the second or third categories, that is ‘teaching as a means of gaining personal agency’ or ‘teaching as a means of assisting others to gain agency.’ These two groups of results could also be classified as reasons egotistical in nature, such as teaching to fulfill their own long held ambition, and reasons altruistic in nature, such as teaching to create a positive experience in children’s lives.

Positive and altruistic motivations are also reoccurring themes in a similar study done in England titled “Students’ reasons for wanting to teach in primary school” (Thornton & Bricheno, 2002, p.1). When discussing the results of the study the authors describe two broad categories of motivations including, reasons that push students towards teaching and reasons that pull students towards teaching (Thornton & Bricheno, 2002). Pull motivations were considered positive and often altruistic, such as always wanting to teach and teaching as a socially valuable profession, while push motivations were considered negative such as lack of other opportunities (Thornton & Bricheno, 2002). While the classification of students’ reasons as positive or negative could be considered somewhat subjective, the results of this study fit neatly into Sumison’s (2000) conceptual framework. For example, students that reported having few other job opportunities would fall into group one ‘little sense of personal agency’, whereas students who reported that they always wanted to teach would fall into group two ‘gaining personal agency’.

Less recently, in 1992, Brookhart and Freeman conducted a review of 44 studies on the characteristics of entering teaching candidates. As a part of this review one of the four categories of variables studied was students' motivation to teach and career expectations. The reoccurring themes the authors found across the studies echo Thornton's (2002) results above. "...The consistent pattern has been that altruistic, service-oriented goals and other intrinsic sources of motivation are the primary reasons entering teacher candidates report for why they chose careers in teaching" (Brookhart & Freeman, 1992, p.46). The unique significance of Brookhart and Freeman's review is that it references education articles from as early as 1960. Taking into consideration that their review itself is twenty years old, it presents a comprehensive overview of the most common reoccurring themes in this topic over a thirty-year period. The more 'recent' articles that Brookhart and Freeman reviewed (dated 1978-1989) listed the following as the top three motivations reported by entering teaching candidates; "...Human service reasons, helping and serving others, and working with people..." (Brookhart & Freeman, 1992, p.47). The articles prior to 1978 reported similar altruistic themed motives such as helping children and serving others, although interestingly one study conducted in 1960 reported that 'good preparation for family life' was the second most common answer given.

Despite the dates of the literature reviewed by Brookhart and Freeman (1992), their data still finds its place within Sumison's (2000) modern framework. The repeated altruistic motivations of helping children and serving others fit into group three 'helping others to gain agency'. Any reported intrinsic sources of motivation fall into group two

‘gaining personal agency’. Even the seemingly outdated reason of good preparation for family life fits neatly into group one – subcategory three ‘little personal agency - to fit anticipated life trajectory’. Interestingly, 40 years on from the 1960 article reviewed by Brookhart and Freeman, Sumison reports similar answers from female participants that also fall within the subcategory ‘to fit anticipated life trajectory’, such as ‘intent to get married and be there for their children’. From a more modern day perspective Sumison suggests that reasons such as these relate to “...expectations of a highly gendered life trajectory” (Sumison, 2000, p.9). She also argues that (from a feminist perspective) these women are unaware that they are constrained by traditional views of gender roles and responsibilities.

The final two studies reviewed here were conducted in 1992 and 2008 in Toronto and Florida respectively. In the Toronto study titled “Why we want to be teachers: new teachers talk about their reasons for entering the profession” (Steigelbauer, 1992, p.2) 203 successful applicants to the education program at the University of Toronto were interviewed on the topic ‘why I want to be a teacher’ and their answers were grouped according to themes and program areas. The Florida study titled “Teaching in the eyes of beholders: pre-service teachers’ reasons for teaching and their beliefs about teaching” (Pop, 2008, p.1) surveyed 215 students enrolled in education courses at The Florida State University. Students completed a ‘reasons for teaching’ questionnaire and the results were analyzed to establish groups and clusters of similar reasons for teaching. Further in depth interviews were then conducted with 25 students to explore their understanding of their goal to become a teacher.

Both of these studies presented their results as a list of the top reoccurring themes or reasons, with both lists having remarkable similarities. (At this stage of the literature review it seems there are no surprises!). Both articles reported the following top themes; 1) teaching as a holistic profession – the need to make a difference; 2) identity issues and teachers as role models for students; 3) meaningful relationships and the teacher/student exchange and 4) teaching a specific subject matter and sharing personal knowledge (Steigelbauer, 1992; Pop, 2008). These four themes fall within group 2 and 3 of Sumison's (2000) conceptual framework - 'gaining personal agency' and 'assisting other to gain agency'. The additional two reoccurring themes reported in the Florida study 'teaching job benefits' and 'job opportunities through teaching' also fall within the 'gaining personal agency' group.

In her own literature review, Pop (2008) categorizes the results of similar studies as reasons intrinsic, extrinsic or altruistic in nature. Intrinsic referring to internal motivations such as love of teaching, extrinsic referring to external motivations such as paid holidays and altruistic referring to selfless reasons such as helping children or improving society (Pop, 2008). Without doubt, these three terms, particularly 'intrinsic' and 'altruistic' are the most common throughout the five studies reviewed here. While it is important to understand the most common reasons students chose to be teachers, more pertinent for this study is an understanding of *all* the possible reasons students chose to become teachers. As demonstrated, Sumison's (2000) comprehensive conceptual

framework can be used a means to gain this understanding, and as mentioned earlier, will aid in shaping an effective and efficient research tool for this study.

As far as this study is concerned it is predicted that students' reasons for wanting to become teachers will be significant only insofar as they connect (or don't connect) with students' knowledge of the economic prospects for teachers in regards to employment, students' knowledge of the HRSB teaching system and students' perceived advantages in gaining employment over others.

Economic Prospects for Teachers in Halifax in Regards to Employment

The current surplus of teachers in Nova Scotia is undeniable, and according to Press and Galway (2002), this surplus is anything but reasonable.

“A reasonable surplus can best be defined as one that provides an adequate supply of highly qualified candidates in all fields and in all regions, without creating too large a pool of highly unemployed or underemployed.” (Press & Galway, 2002, p. 30)

This section of the review will consider the literature surrounding the current teacher surplus, including all related factors that contribute to the poor economic prospects for teachers in Halifax in regards to employment. The relevant literature in this section is a combination of research and analytical papers and media articles.

At this point in the literature review it is important to mention that while discussions surrounding the current teacher labour market refer to the whole of Nova Scotia, this research project itself will focus solely on the HRSB. This is for two reasons. Firstly, the HRSB is the largest school board in Nova Scotia and by far employs the most teachers. As a result, most of the issues discussed in this literature review occur frequently and/or are compounded within this board. Secondly, the study will only be concerned with the HRSB for size and feasibility purposes. In most aspects the results of this study will be generalizable to other Nova Scotian school boards as they are all governed by similar collective agreements.

Demand.

The *Nova Scotia Public Education Supply and Demand Report* was published in 2000, updated in 2007 and most recently in 2012. The latest update makes projections up until 2017/18. The purpose of the report was to examine the teacher labour market in Nova Scotia and to make projections regarding teacher supply and demand. This report provides an unambiguous description of the current circumstances for teachers in Nova Scotia.

The report states that demand (the number of new teachers required each year by the school boards) is primarily influenced by changes in both student enrollment and teacher attrition levels. Both of these levels are currently declining in Nova Scotia. In the HRSB between 2005-06 and 2009-10 student enrollment in public schools declined by

5.7%, and were projected to continue to decline at similar rates between 2009-10 and 2013-14 (*NS Teacher Supply and Demand*, 2012). Some boards within Nova Scotia were predicted to see decreases of up to 13% (*NS Teacher Supply and Demand*, 2012). While student enrollment is fundamental to the number of teachers required, it is teacher retirement makes up the largest component of the demand for new teachers. Based on analyses from the Nova Scotia Pension Agency, the report makes predictions as to how many teachers will retire, and when. It projected that in 2010-11 retirements would peak, and then begin to steadily decline through to 2017-18 (*NS Teacher Supply and Demand*, 2012). Interestingly, the steady decline of teacher retirements and reduced enrollments combined with slight decreases in student-teacher ratio and an increase in temporary teacher attrition actually sees the demand for new teachers increasing slightly over the next six years. Over the report's projection period (2009-10 – 2017-18) the average annual demand for teachers is approximately 281 teachers per year (*NS Teacher Supply and Demand*, 2012). Unfortunately, as the next sections demonstrates, supply still far outweighs demand.

Supply.

The supply of new teachers to the school board is measured by the number of new teaching certificates issued each year to teachers living in Nova Scotia. Data from the 2007 report update shows that the number of new teachers has been steadily increasing since 2002. In 2002 there were 785 new certificates issued, compared with 1029 in 2006 (*NS Teacher Supply and Demand*, 2007). The 2012 update shows that while certifications

from Nova Scotia institutions are still increasing, the number of teaching certificates issued overall have decreased slightly, from 1009 in 2005 to 929 in 2009 (*NS Teacher Supply and Demand*, 2012). The majority of new teachers are graduates of teacher education programs within Nova Scotia, followed by graduates of Atlantic Canada universities (*NS Teacher Supply and Demand*, 2012). Interestingly, the number of new teachers coming from universities in Maine is almost equivalent to the number coming from other Atlantic Universities. On average, the report estimates the supply of new teachers to be approximately 944 per year, this is based on the number of new teacher certifications and data surrounding the number of annual applicants to Nova Scotia teacher education programs (*NS Teacher Supply and Demand*, 2012).

Oversupply.

The figures presented in the supply and demand report (2012) show that throughout the timeframe projected by the report the supply of new teachers will be significantly higher than the demand. However the report does conclude that some rural locations within the province may have trouble attracting teachers, particularly for certain subject areas and specialties (*NS Teacher Supply and Demand*, 2012). This is also true of substitute teachers. With an ever-growing pool of substitute teachers there will be more than enough supply to meet demand, with the exception again of some rural areas and specialty subjects (*NS Teacher Supply and Demand*, 2012). While the report does not provide specific statistics on the ratio of supply and demand per school board, it would be

fair to assume that the issue of oversupply is compounded with the HRSB, due to the high volume of teachers employed and the fact that it's a metropolitan centre.

Budget cuts.

Another contributing factor to the poor economic prospects for teachers in Halifax are education budget cuts, which are fundamentally linked to declining enrollments. In April 2011, 44 probationary teachers in the HRSB lost their jobs due to a 2% budget cut ("More Teaching Positions Cut," 2011). The budget cuts were deemed necessary due to declining enrollments, a budget deficit of 389 million dollars and a general surplus of elementary teachers (Goodyear, 2011; "More Teaching Positions Cut," 2011). While most of these teachers were eventually offered their positions back, budget cuts and consequent job losses are likely to continue as enrollments are predicted to continue to decline and reductions in department spending are set to continue for at least two years. (Goodyear, 2011; *NS Teacher Supply and Demand*, 2012; "Too Many Teachers, 2008). Beyond the obvious consequences for the teachers who lose their jobs are the implications for the supply and demand balance with the addition of more bodies to the already over-stocked pool of teachers looking for work. A CBC article commented that (due to the HRSB hierarchical hiring system) the situation is particularly unfortunate for new teachers who have no prior standing within the school board ("New Teachers", 2011).

The Canadian Teacher published an article in 2011 (also in response to the job losses) that suggested another possible contributing factor to the education budget cuts. "...Because of an ageing population, a greater percentage of government spending will have to be re-directed towards health-care rather than education" ("New Teacher Unemployment", 2011, p 1). While this comment is specifically related to the government's financial priorities, it does raise the issue of an ageing population and a workforce nearing retirement, a common thread in the literature surrounding the economic prospects for teachers.

An ageing workforce.

A 2008 CBC article reporting on the lack of teaching jobs in Nova Scotia quoted the Education Minister at the time, Karen Casey, as being surprised by the labour market figures. "I was of the same belief that with retirements in the baby boomers, for example, that a number of jobs would be opening up for new students, new graduates" ("Too Many New Teachers", 2008, p. 1). The Minister is not alone in her opinion, across the country there has been, and is, a widely held belief that when the baby boomers retire there will be a great increase in the demand for new teachers.

This phenomenon, referred to here as the baby boomer fallacy, is often cited by popular media as the cause of the current oversupply of teachers in many provinces, including Nova Scotia (Tibbetts, 2008; Ursi, 2007). Media articles report that prior to the retirements, more university places were created for teachers in anticipation of the

shortages. When the retirements failed to occur at the rates predicted and the anticipated shortages didn't materialize, many provinces found they had an oversupply of new teaching graduates. The general consensus in popular media is that the retirement rates slowed much sooner than predicted and that teachers were retiring at ages older than anticipated (Mason, 2011; "New Teacher Unemployment", 2011; Tibbetts, 2008). An article in *The Canadian Teacher* suggested the following explanation; "...Older teachers are not retiring at 60 as was expected. People are in much better health and the retirement dream has lost its luster especially as the financial markets have been volatile over the last decade" ("New Teacher Unemployment", 2011, p. 1). The *Nova Scotia Public Education Teaching Supply and Demand Report* (2012) reports on another phenomenon that has caused teacher retirement rates to slow. In 2005 changes were made to the Nova Scotia Teachers Union Pension Plan that caused many teachers to elect to retire early. As a result in 2005-06 58.6% more teachers retired than had been predicted (*NS Teacher Supply and Demand, 2012*). This contributed to a drop in the number of probationary and permanent teachers in Nova Scotia over the age of 50 and hence a drop in the number of teachers nearing retirement. The 2012 report predicts the continuation of slowing retirements, with the exception of a small peak in 2010-11, it shows that retirements will continue to decline at a steady rate over the next 7 years.

In a 1997 paper, author Alain Tremblay expresses a conservative view of the baby boomer fallacy. In this paper Tremblay analyzes how the retirements of teachers in Canada will effect the hiring of new teachers, given the ageing workforce. "At a time when young people graduating from elementary and secondary education programs are

having great difficulty finding teaching jobs, it appears that their employment prospects will improve as a result of their older colleagues' retirement" (Tremblay, 1997, p. 1). Tremblay states that the demand for new teachers would be most sizable if all teachers retired by age 55, however he found that even in 1995 in most provinces the average retirement age was closer to 60. Tremblay also conducts analysis by region and finds that as the factors contributing to supply and demand vary, so do the projections. He explains why Nova Scotia in particular will not face a shortage; "In the Atlantic region, owing to a projected sizable decrease in school enrollments and a low percentage of teachers retiring, a teacher surplus can be expected until 2010" (Tremblay, 1997, p. 64). It would appear that Tremblay's prediction was fairly accurate, despite being contradictory to popular opinion.

In general, the literature contains mixed messages on when the peak in retirements occurred, to what extent it occurred and the exact effect it had on teacher supply. However the most significant information for new teachers in Nova Scotia is the information presented in the supply and demand report. That is, that the peak of retirements *has* already occurred and consequently there is no imminent teacher shortage, in fact, as one article points out, the next round of sizeable retirements wont be until the teachers hired in the early 2000's begin to retire in many years time from now (Ursi, 2007).

Causes, consequences and recommendations.

The cause of the current oversupply of teachers could be explained as a simple problem of supply out-weighting demand. The literature blames the imbalance on varying factors such as the baby boomer fallacy, budget cuts, declining enrollments, a high proportion of education programs in Nova Scotia and the ready availability of education programs in other provinces and US states (*NS Teacher Supply and Demand*, 2012). Whatever the cause, a key consequence of the imbalance and an illustration of the poor economic prospects for teachers in regards to employment is the typical career path for a new teacher in Nova Scotia.

The HRSB's policies and practices will be discussed in more detail in the next section of the review, but for now it is important to understand that the HRSB's hiring system is hierarchical one and that as a candidate gradually gains seniority they also gain access to more job opportunities. The merits of this system are a topic for another paper, however it is important to recognize how a seniority-based system such as this and a growing oversupply of teachers can effectively lock-out new graduates from full time teaching positions.

While popular news sources will occasionally refer to this system when describing a specific classification of teacher, they are more often referring to the commonly accepted 'typical career path' of a new Nova Scotian teacher. A CBC article published in April 2011 reporting on the budget cuts said "The Halifax layoffs are being

sent to probationary teachers who were in the final stages of qualifying for a permanent job. Many of those teachers have spent years as a substitute teacher hoping to get permanent positions” (“More Teaching Positions Cut”, 2011, p. 1). The reoccurring thread, and safe to say widely held belief, is that a new teacher will spend approximately 3-5 years substituting, accruing teaching days and/or term contracts, before gaining full time employment. A CBC article published in February 2011 titled *New Teachers Face Bleak Job Picture* quotes a student as saying “We did not expect to get full time teaching positions at the end of our program” (“New Teachers”, 2011, p.1). The article also makes reference to the extremely high number of teachers on the substitute list in the HRSB, a figure supported by the 2012 teacher supply and demand report, implying that not only are new teachers facing years of unpredictable and unreliable work, but they are also facing fierce competition for that work. In a 2002 paper on the teacher labor market, Press & Galway (2002) commented “From the broader social and economic policy perspective, however, the existence of a large pool of teacher graduates represents a loss of productivity and a large number of workers who will either experience delayed entry into the workforce or choose an alternate career path that may require additional training and the accumulation of more personal debt” (p. 29-30).

So what is the solution? The literature makes several suggestions. Tremblay suggests that part of the answer lies with universities training less teachers in conjunction with provinces certifying less teachers. “...If the provinces continue to issue teaching certificates at the same rate as in past years, there will continue to be a surplus of persons qualified to teach” (Tremblay, 1997, p. 66). Tremblay also suggests a drop in the pupil-

teacher ratio as a means for increasing teacher demand, although he admits that this is unlikely to happen. An article published in the Chronicle Herald in 2011 supports the suggestion of training fewer teachers, but also suggests that pre-service teachers should be taught more skills during their program that they can apply to alternative careers (Fraser, 2011). The same article advises hopeful teachers to specialize in in-demand subject areas, sentiments echoed by Education Minister Karen Casey in a 2007 news release (*Surplus of Teachers*, 2011). Finally one columnist simply suggests that students should give up on teaching. “So what can be done about it? Not much, it seems. Governments can’t insist that teachers retire earlier or that couples should have more children. I guess teaching just represents another dead end for kids seeking jobs today” (Mason, 2011, p. 1).

The Halifax Regional School Board’s Policies and Practices in Regards to Teachers and Teacher Employment

The purpose of this section of the literature review is to provide a brief overview the policies and practices of the Halifax Regional School Board (HRSB), specifically the policies and practices relating to teachers and teacher employment. This is to demonstrate the hierarchical nature of the HRSB system, and to show how this system can make it extremely difficult for a graduate teacher to gain full time employment during a teacher surplus. The information in this section of the literature review comes from collective agreements and HRSB documents.

Teacher classification and seniority.

Within the HRSB there are various classifications for teachers, including: Substitute, Aggregate, Term I, Term II, Probationary and Permanent. Generally, these classifications refer to the seniority level of the teachers, that is, how long they have been teaching for. For example, an Aggregate teacher is someone who has accumulated 390 teaching days over consecutive years, whereas a Term II teacher is someone who has had two full time terms in consecutive years with the school board equaling a minimum of 175 days (*NSTU local collective agreement, 2004*). The policies regarding when and how jobs are advertised and who can apply for them are strongly interlinked with the classification system. So too are the rules regarding who will be first to lose their jobs in cases of reduction.

In April, teaching positions for the following year begin to be advertised, and teachers can apply for them based on their seniority level (*NSTU local collective agreement, 2004*). The first round of advertisements comes in the form of a job fair, which is an opportunity for teaching candidates to meet face to face with the Principals from various schools (*HR Services 2011 job fair information, 2012*). Traditionally the job fair is only open to the most senior ranks of teachers including Permanent, Probationary, Term II and Aggregate. However due to a lack of jobs in 2011, Aggregate and Term II teachers were no longer able to attend (*HR Services 2011 job fair information, 2012*). After the job fair, any remaining vacancies begin to be advertised on the HRSB website on a weekly basis, and teachers apply for these jobs based on their seniority level. A

graduate teacher with no experience within the school board will not be eligible to apply for any jobs until mid June. To complicate matters further, until mid-October ‘term recall’ is in effect (*HRSB employment*, 2012). This means that any teacher of a Term I status or higher who has yet to find a new teaching contract will be automatically placed in an open vacancy. When the number of teachers on the term-recall list outweighs the number of job vacancies, there are no real job opportunities for new teachers. A teacher who has had experience on the school board will always have priority over those who haven’t.

The one general exception to this situation is in-demand subject areas, such as high school physics, technology education and physical education. As the supply and demand report stated, despite an oversupply of teachers, there is still demand in certain subject areas (*NS Teacher Supply and Demand*, 2012). A teacher with the right qualifications would almost certainly be given the opportunity to interview for these positions, whether they have prior standing within the school board or not. When a school is not constricted by the hiring policies (if there were no qualified candidates on the term recall list, for example), these positions would likely be awarded on a merit basis. They are the rare exception.

In cases of forced reduction, when the school needs to reduce its number of teachers due to reasons such as budget cuts or declining enrollments as opposed to natural attrition, the teachers with the least seniority are the first to go (*Collective agreement*

between HRSB and NSTU, 2011). As mentioned earlier, these teachers are then given priority status when new vacancies arise.

A new teacher with no qualifications in an in-demand subject area has little-to-no chance of gaining a full time teaching position based simply on merit. They are given the opportunity to apply, but in reality the positions are simply designated to teachers with prior standing. The most common practice for new teachers is to substitute teach. An unreliable and potentially unsatisfying route, it is often the only choice. The ultimate hope of a substitute teacher is that during the school year they might be in the right place at the right time when a long-term substitute or short-term position becomes available. During the school year the policies governing who these positions are offered to are not as strict, and a principal may offer them to a competent substitute (*NSTU local collective agreement, 2004*). Over time, with enough term contracts or aggregate days accrued a substitute teacher may eventually begin to gain status, and as a result each year the job opportunities available to them may continue to improve. However with over 1000 substitutes registered in the HRSB this process can take years (*NS Teacher Supply and Demand, 2012*).

In a teacher labour market where supply equaled demand, or demand even outweighed supply, the HRSB classification and hiring system would be suitable. It protects the seniority of teachers, and as per many industries it requires teachers to work for several years before earning a permanent position. However when there is an oversupply of teachers, a hierarchical system such as this can effectively block new

teachers out of the school board. In addition, when there is an oversupply of teachers, the policies surrounding hiring and reduction do not allow for performance-based assessment, at least at the lower levels.

Perceived Advantages in Gaining Employment as a Teacher

This final section of the literature review will consider some of the advantages students perceive they have over others in gaining teaching employment.

In a balanced teacher labour market traditional employability skills such as interpersonal skills and communication skills could be the deciding factor between two equally qualified candidates (Wibrow, 2011). However during a teacher surplus such as the one currently occurring in Nova Scotia, the type of advantages that new teaching graduates need to bring to the table are much more specific than simply being able to communicate well with their employer. There are two real advantages often referred to in the media that a teaching graduate may have, including a willingness to travel and specialization in an in-demand subject area. “During conditions marking a general surplus of teachers, for example, there may be shortages of qualified teachers in certain program areas, in certain skills areas, in certain geographic locations, or in certain types of schools” (Press, 1997, p.17). There are also other advantages that students may perceive they have yet their effectiveness in today’s current labor market remains to be seen, such as self-efficacy and/or previous experience.

Willingness to travel.

While *The Nova Scotia Public Education Supply and Demand Report* (2012) stated that there is a general surplus of teachers in Nova Scotia, it repeatedly referenced the fact that certain geographical locations throughout the province may have difficulty in attracting new teachers. This is particularly true of substitute teachers. Although the number of overall substitute teachers in the province continues to grow, the distribution is uneven. “The combination of the large number of substitutes employed in the HRSB, along with the probability that many substitutes live in (or in close proximity to) the Halifax Regional Municipality and choose to work in the HRSB, leaves only so much of the substitute pool left from which the other seven boards can draw” (*NS Teacher Supply and Demand*, 2012, p.22). While the HRSB employs the highest number of substitutes (35 percent), school boards such as Tri County, South Shore and Consell Scolaire Acadien employ the lowest (5 to 7 percent) (*NS Teacher Supply and Demand*, 2012). The 1997 *Teacher Demand in Canada* study reported similar findings regarding the difficulty of recruiting teachers to rural and remote areas. However it makes clear distinction between a general shortage and a skills shortage. “While the likelihood of a general teacher shortage in rural and isolated schools is remote, the likelihood of a skill shortage for these schools is substantial” (Press, 1997, p.20).

The same sentiments are often echoed in media articles reporting on the oversupply. A 2011 Chronicle Herald article makes reference to the fact that there are more jobs for substitute teachers in rural communities (Fraser, 2011). A 2008 National

Post article adds that in addition to rural areas, teachers are in short supply in northern areas and aboriginal communities (Tibbetts, 2008). To the extent that pre-service teachers are aware of the current oversupply of teachers, it would be fair to assume that that they are also aware of their increased chances of employment if they are willing to travel. As a substitute teacher this may mean a willingness to travel a little further to potential jobs each day, or for a skilled teacher hoping to find full time work more quickly, it may mean moving to a new community all together. In a 2011 CBC article on the bleak job future faced by new teachers, a teaching student commented on her feelings about her job prospects; “We did not expect to get full-time teaching positions at the end of our program...almost all of us, as students, feel like we have to go overseas or go up north for positions” (“New Teachers”, 2011, p.1).

In-demand subject areas.

In the 2011 Chronicle Herald article mentioned above, Mike Christie the director of human resources at the HRSB was quoted making the following recommendations for pre service teachers; “With no looming spike in retirements or drop in potential candidates, Christie said he would advise teacher hopefuls to specialize in an in-demand subject. Those who have a background in French, math, physics, or technology are more needed than elementary school or English teachers” (Fraser, 2011, p. 2). In addition to difficulties recruiting skilled teachers to remote and rural areas, teacher shortages in specific subject areas are also a reoccurring theme in the literature.

The supply and demand report (2012) generalized that while there is an overall surplus of teachers, the surplus is much smaller in math, chemistry, physics, fine arts and business. It refers to a 'tight market' in physical education, technology education and family studies. In regards to substitute teachers the report found that during peak periods the school boards reported having difficulty finding substitute teachers to meet the demand in certain subject and specialty areas (*NS Teacher Supply and Demand*, 2012). Throughout the literature, French is constantly referenced as an in-demand subject area (Press, 1997; Tibbetts, 2008). Interestingly, the supply and demand report showed that while there is a surplus of teachers with a major or minor in French, the challenge for schools is recruiting teachers who are fluent in French and have an academic background in other subject areas (*NS Teacher Supply and Demand*, 2012).

In the 1997 labour market report, schools were asked to list the subject areas they anticipated having difficulty filling in the future. The top five subjects were technology, sciences, math, special education and French immersion (Press, 1997). Apparently not much has changed over the last 30 years. This list is similar to the subjects listed in a 1974 information booklet for new teachers from the Canadian Teachers Federation. "Occasional or reoccurring shortages do occur in specific fields, for example, kindergarten, special education, mathematics and science, and certain vocational subjects. However the demand for teachers of general and secondary subjects is rather light" (*Teaching in Canada*, 1974, p.19).

Most reports, including the two mentioned here conclude with advice similar to that of Mike Christie offered above. “In areas of shortage, continued effort is required to recruit teachers with an appropriate backgrounds to meet these subject-area needs” (*NS Teacher Supply and Demand*, 2012, p.35). “Opportunities will be greatest for those who carefully try and match their skills, qualifications and interests with the needs of school districts” (Press, 1997, p.19).

Other advantages.

The two advantages discussed above are proven advantages as demonstrated by the literature. However there are other advantages students may perceive they have, such as self-efficacy or previous and/or related experience. In a balanced job market these could be real advantages, unfortunately however, in a time of teacher surplus and with the hiring policies and practices of the HRSB, assets such as self-efficacy and previous experience give no advantage at all. For example, no matter how impressive a new graduate’s resume, or how many principals they meet, it is highly likely the positions they are able to apply for will be filled from the term recall list. Nor does it matter if they have many years successful teaching experience in another country combined with glowing references, if they have no prior standing within the school board they will start on the bottom rung of the ladder with all the new graduates.

Unfortunately not all the literature available to new graduates is sending out this message. An article published in *The Canadian Teacher* titled 'How to Land a Teaching Job', reassures teacher hopefuls that all it takes is a visit to the local school board's HR department, networking and a thorough job search online (Davies, 2011). A career management professional wrote the article, and while some of its advice may be relevant in other countries where the teaching climate is different, it makes light of a very serious issue in Nova Scotia - the availability of teaching jobs. Articles such as this one may be responsible for giving false hope to graduates, especially in regards to the perceived advantage of self-efficacy.

Chapter 3. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework (see Figure 1) was designed to answer the primary research question: why are a significant number of students enrolling in teacher education programs at a time when the economic prospects for teachers in Halifax are so poor?

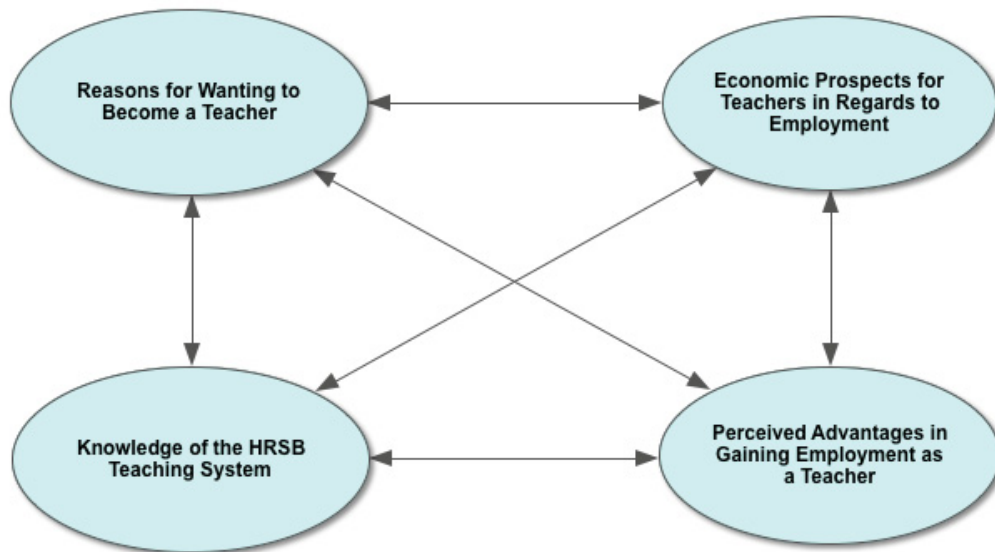


Figure 1: Conceptual framework.

Constructs

Note: ‘Students’ refers to students enrolled in teacher education programs in Halifax who intend to seek employment as a teacher within the Halifax Regional School Board (HRSB) upon completion of their program.

Reasons for wanting to be a teacher.

This construct refers to students' reasons and motivations for wanting to become teachers, presumably quite separate from their knowledge of the teaching system or the job market. It was predicted that the majority of these reasons would be intrinsic in nature, such as (but not limited to) a desire to work with children, a desire to have a satisfying career, a desire to make a difference in the lives of children or a desire to emulate an inspirational teacher from the past.

Economic prospects for teachers in regards to employment.

This construct refers to students' perceptions of the current teaching job market in the HRSB. This includes their perception of the following:

- Whether they will gain employment;
- What type of position they will gain (full time, part time);
- The timeframe in which they will gain employment; and
- The timeframe in which they will gain an increased time percentage (e.g. substitute to long-term substitute or 'term').

Knowledge of the local school board's teaching system (HRSB).

This refers to the students' knowledge of the practices and policies of the HRSB in regards to teachers and teachers' jobs. Specifically their knowledge of:

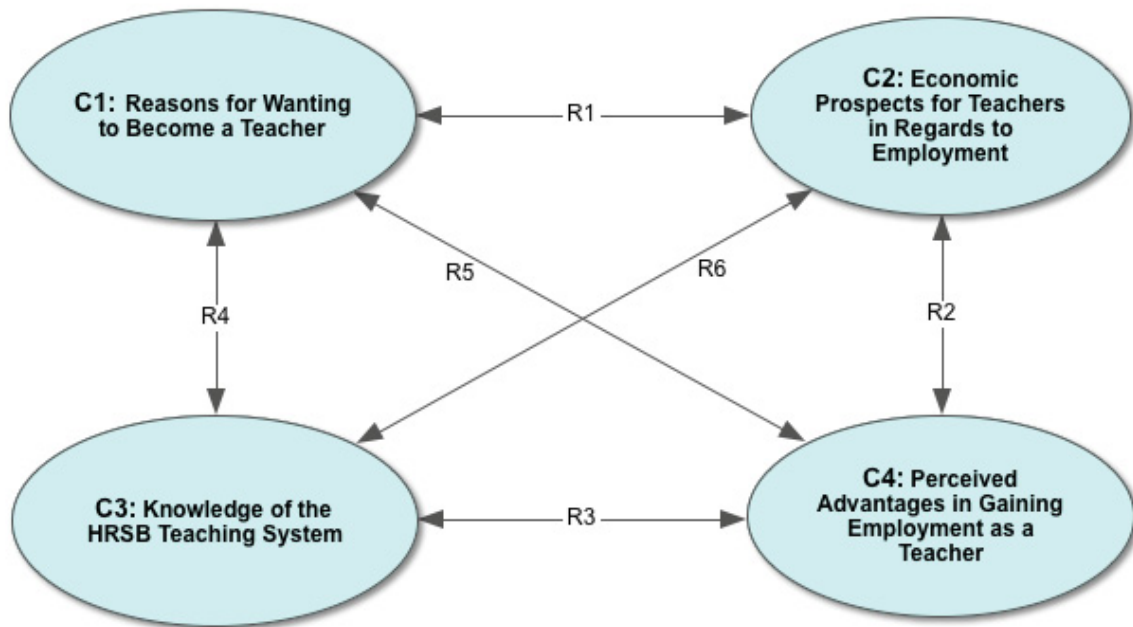
- Teacher classifications and seniority gaining practices; and
- Hiring policies and practices.

Perceived advantages in gaining employment as a teacher.

This refers to students' belief in their enhanced ability to gain employment due to an advantage that they perceive they have over other applicants. Examples of advantages may include: speaking a second language, previous experience, willingness to travel or self-efficacy.

Relationships Between Constructs

An essential component of the conceptual framework is the relationships between construct areas (see Figure 2) and the information these relationships provide regarding the primary research question.



Legend:

C1 = Construct 1	R1 = Relationship 1
C2 = Construct 2	R2 = Relationship 2
C3 = Construct 3	R3 = Relationship 3
C4 = Construct 4	R4 = Relationship 4
	R5 = Relationship 5
	R6 = Relationship 6

Figure 2: Conceptual framework with codes.

These relationships were considered in terms of correlation. It was predicted that relationship 1, 4, and 5 would not show a correlation due to the nature of construct 1, in that students’ reasons for wanting to become teachers had the potential to overrule any knowledge or lack of knowledge of the other three constructs. The potential correlations between relationship 2, 3 and 6 are discussed in more detail below.

Relationship 2: The relationship between the economic prospects for teachers in regards to employment and students' perceived advantages in gaining employment as a teacher.

The research question is: is there a correlation between students' understanding of their job prospects upon graduating and their perceived advantages in gaining employment more easily than others? It was predicted that students' perceived advantages would fall into one of two categories; those that will likely give them an advantage such as speaking a second language, and those that may not give them an advantage such as 'being determined'.

It was hypothesized that there would be a correlation between realistic advantages and an accurate understanding of job prospects, and between un-realistic advantages and an inaccurate understanding of job prospects.

For example, if a student presumes that their ability to speak a second language is an advantage then there is a good chance they know that there is a demand for French language teachers. Whereas a student who believes that their level of self-efficacy is an advantage may not have an accurate understanding of the number of qualified teachers that they will be competing against.

Relationship 3: The relationship between students knowledge of the HRSB teaching system and students' perceived advantages in gaining employment.

The research question is: is there a correlation between students' knowledge of the HRSB's policies and practices in regards to teacher employment and their perceived advantages in gaining employment more easily than others? It was predicted that any correlations discovered here would be similar to those discussed above. That is that there would be a correlation between realistic advantages and a good knowledge of the HRSB's teaching system and a correlation between unrealistic advantages and a poor knowledge of the system.

For example, if a student understands the term recall process in regards to job vacancies then they may also realise that their previous experience will not be a realistic advantage.

Relationship 6: The relationship between students' knowledge of the HRSB teaching system and their knowledge of the current economic prospects for teachers in Halifax in regards to employment.

The research question here is: is there a correlation between students' understanding of the policies and practices of the HRSB and their knowledge of the job market and job prospects upon graduating? It was hypothesized that a lack of knowledge of the teaching system would correlate with an inaccurate or incomplete understanding of the teaching job market. In addition, it was hypothesized that a more accurate understanding of the job market would correlate with a more comprehensive understanding of the teaching system.

For example, if a student does not understand the ‘term recall’ process they may have an inaccurate understanding of the number of job vacancies that will be available to them. Whereas if a student has knowledge of the job fair and their own position within the hiring hierarchy they will presumably have an accurate knowledge of the ‘typical career path’ that awaits them.

Chapter 4. Methods

Sample

The population of interest for this study was students enrolled in the Bachelor of Education program at Mount Saint Vincent University (MSVU) who intended to seek a teaching job within the Halifax Regional School Board at the completion of their program. The sample type was a cross sectional sample of BEd students who were enrolled in their first year of the program. Study participants were recruited via personal contact with the researcher. Through cooperation with several professors, the researcher approached the students in their classes and asked for their voluntary participation in the survey (for more information, see procedures). The researcher approached three groups in total; two classes for the first year elementary students and one seminar class for the first year secondary students. The total population sample was 96 students with an 88% survey return rate.

Importance of Sample

First year students.

As this study was concerned with students' knowledge and understanding of the *current* situation for teachers in Halifax in combination with their decision to train to become teachers at this time, it was appropriate to select the people that most recently

decided to become teachers. It was also important to use first year students so that the results of the study reflected the knowledge and opinions that the students came into the Education program with and not any additional knowledge or possible biases they acquired along the way. For this reason also, it was important to survey the participants as close as possible to the start date of their program – September 2012. (Surveys were conducted in mid October 2012).

MSVU.

As mentioned earlier, for size and feasibility purposes this study only considered the economic prospects for teachers within the Halifax Regional School Board (HRSB) as opposed to the whole of Nova Scotia, for example. While there are several Universities in Nova Scotia with education programs that potentially feed a supply of new teachers to the HRSB, MSVU has the largest program that is situated within Halifax itself. It was predicted that MSVU would provide a large enough sample size from which to generalize results, while contributing to the feasibility of the study through the ease of access to study participants.

Students seeking a job within the HRSB.

This study was only concerned with students who intended to seek a job at a school within the HRSB as opposed to seeking a job at a private school in the Halifax area. This is due to the fact that private schools are not governed by HRSB policies and

practices and therefore the economic prospects for their teachers may vary from that of public schools. It was predicted that excluding private schools would not affect the validity of the study due to the high ratio of public to private schools.

Measures

This study measured students' knowledge, understandings and beliefs related to four key constructs. The data was then statistically analysed in order to explore the connections between these four areas of knowledge.

A cross sectional survey was used to measure students' understanding of the four constructs. The questionnaire-format survey consisted of 32 questions with varying answer scales. There was one open-ended question at the end of the survey that allowed for the participants to make an optional comment. The purposes of each set of questions and an example question are shown in Table 1. For the full survey please see Appendix A.

Table 1

Survey Question Examples

Construct	Purpose of Questions	Example Question
Demographics	To collect basic demographic data (sex, age) and identify any participants who didn't intend to become teachers or teach within the HRSB.	Q 3: Do you intend to seek a job as a teacher within a school after the completion of your program? A: <i>Yes, No, Unsure</i>
Employment	To measure students' understanding of their economic prospects after graduation.	Q 5: I believe I will be successful in gaining employment as a teacher (either full time or part time) at some point after the completion of my program. A: <i>Yes, No, Unsure</i>
HRSB	To measure students self-assessed ^a knowledge of the HRSB's policies and practices in relation to teachers and teacher employment.	Q 9: I am familiar with the hiring policies and practices of the HRSB. A: <i>Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Unsure</i>

Survey Question Examples Cont.

Construct	Purpose of Questions	Example Question
Being a Teacher	To measure why students want to become teachers, and, within a five point rating scale, how important their reasons are to them. (See further explanation below)	Q 15: I want to become a teacher because I want to make a difference in children's lives. A: <i>Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Unsure</i>
Advantages	To assess if students believe they will have an advantage when looking for employment, and what these advantages might be.	Q 27. I believe I will have an advantage in gaining employment as a teacher over other candidates because I speak an additional language. A: <i>Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Unsure</i>

Note. Q = question; A = answer options. ^aFor comparison purposes it would have been ideal to measure what students *think* they know and what they *actually* know, however to do so within the scope of this survey was simply too big. Instead, the questions in this section were designed for students to self-declare their level of knowledge on specific topics without having to give an actual correct answer. To some extent, through the use of a 5-point rating scale, the students could demonstrate their confidence in their knowledge.

The questions in the 'Reasons for being a teacher' section of the survey were further divided into four sub categories, although they were not identified on the survey. The four categories were:

- Altruistic reasons – reasons related to others
- Intrinsic reasons – reasons related to self
- Extrinsic reasons – reasons with little sense of personal agency
- Self as a reform agent – reasons related to reform (educational, social/political)

There were three questions per category, the purpose of which was to group students' answers into the four general areas while keeping the survey user friendly. The categories were chosen based on a review of related studies, and further explanation of the categories can be found in the literature review.

Survey development and testing.

The conceptual framework and literature review were integral to the design of the survey. The conceptual framework provided an outline for the necessary sections of the survey, while the literature review helped shape the individual questions, including what topics should be included and excluded. Prior to data collection, the survey was given to two teachers known to the researcher in order to seek feedback regarding time taken to complete the survey and any confusion or comments regarding the content. This process was useful and changes were made to the survey after each set of feedback was received.

For example, one test participant commented that her reason for wanting to be a teacher wasn't an option in the survey, and so the 'reasons for wanting to become a teacher' section was expanded.

Procedures

Step 1: The research problem was defined through a conceptual framework and research questions were created. Key constructs were identified within the conceptual framework.

Step 2: A review of the literature was conducted with consideration given to literature pertaining to each of the four key constructs.

Step 3: The sample population and sampling plan was defined.

Step 4: The questionnaire survey was constructed and tested.

Step 5: The research study was proposed to a committee and was approved by the University's ethical review board.

Step 6: Data Collection

- Data was collected a month and half into the start date of the BEd program.
- Through cooperation with university professors, arrangements were made to visit the students in the last 15 minutes of their classes.
- The researcher explained the questionnaire to the students and asked for their participation. The researcher explicitly stated that participation was voluntary, and also used this time to explain the contents of the consent letter, including

the anonymity of the survey, how the data would be stored and used, and how the results would become available to the students.

- If the students chose to participate they were given a letter of consent to read and sign. The survey was then distributed in paper format. The researcher stayed in the room to collect the surveys as the students completed them. The researcher was available at this time to answer any questions the students had. If students chose not to participate they were free to leave their class early.
- The paper surveys were kept securely in the research supervisor's office.

Step 7: The data from the surveys was tabulated and analyzed. Electronic data was kept in a password-protected file on the researcher's hard drive.

Step 8: The report of results and conclusions was prepared.

Chapter 5: Results

The results of this study are presented in the following five sections:

- Participant characteristics;
- Sub-constructs;
- Correlations between construct areas;
- Further analyses; and
- Qualitative results.

Participant Characteristics

Eighty-Five students participated in the survey, 17 were male and 68 were female. The majority of students were in the 20-25 age-bracket (72.9%), the second largest group was the 26-30 age-bracket (18.8%). All but two of the students indicated that they intended to seek a job as a teacher at the completion of their program, however only 83.7% were certain that they would stay within the Halifax Regional School Board (HRSB). 89.4% of students believed they would be successful in gaining employment as a teacher at some point after the completion of their program, while the majority of the remaining percentage was unsure (9.4%). In response to question six, regarding how long students believed it would take to gain any type of teaching employment, 58.8% of the students said 6 months plus, 20% said 4-6 months and 16.5% said 2-3 months. When

asked if their first teaching position would be full time or part time, the majority of students answered either part time or unsure (48.2% and 38.8% respectively). Of the students that believed their first teaching position would be part time, 51.1% believed they would gain full time employment within 1-2 years, 26.7% believed it would take 3-4 years and only 8.9% answered 5 years or more.

Cross tabulations were examined in order to gain further information on the above categorical variables. There were notable results regarding employment time frame and type. Of the students who believed that it would take 6 months or more to gain any type of teaching employment, the vast majority believed that their first job would be part time. Whereas the students who believed that it would take 2-3 months to gain employment were nearly split equally regarding whether that employment would be part time or full time.

Sub-Constructs

The four construct areas were:

- Students' reasons for wanting to become a teacher;
- Students' knowledge of the economic prospects for teachers in regards to employment (in the HRSB);
- Students' knowledge of the HRSB teaching system; and
- Advantages students perceive they have in gaining teaching employment over others.

Each of these four construct areas was represented by a series of questions in the survey. From each series of questions a sub-construct (or constructs) was created to summarize each student's answers or level of knowledge. This was done by first assigning numerical values to the answers of each series of questions or variables. Chronbach Alpha was used as a measure of reliability (internal consistency) for each set of variables. With the exception of the Advantages construct, the reliability of each set of variables was strong (greater than .7). The reliability of the Advantages construct was poor, until survey question 27 was removed. This question, and its effect on the reliability of this construct area will be considered separately in the discussion section of the report.

Descriptive statistics were then examined within each construct area and on each sub-construct in order to summarize the data and understand the variability. The results are summarized below.

Students' reasons for wanting to become a teacher.

Four sub-constructs were created to summarize the results of this construct area. The Alpha value of this construct was .73. Each sub-construct groups the type of reasons and the strength of these reasons. The four sub-constructs were; Altruistic Reasons, Intrinsic Reasons, Extrinsic Reasons and Reasons Related to Reform. 100% of students agreed or strongly agreed with the altruistic reasons for becoming a teacher. The variability of the intrinsic reasons was similar with 82.1% of students agreeing or strongly agreeing with these reasons. The students' answers regarding extrinsic reasons were more widely dispersed, with 26.2% sitting almost exactly halfway between agree and disagree. The students either side of this group is almost equal, 40.6% generally disagreeing with the extrinsic reasons and 33.5% generally agreeing with them. Students' reasons related to reform were also more widely dispersed, however the majority still fell between agree and strongly agree (79.7%).

Measures of dispersion are illustrated in Table 2. Please note: the values assigned to each answer label were as follows:

- Strongly disagree = 1
- Disagree = 2
- Agree = 3
- Strongly Agree = 4

Table 2

Measure of Dispersion for Students' Reasons for Becoming Teachers

Sub-construct	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Altruistic Reasons	84	3	4	3.78	0.31
Intrinsic Reasons	84	1.67	4	3.33	0.55
Extrinsic Reasons	84	1	4	2.61	0.66
Reform Reasons	84	1.67	4	3.32	0.57

Students' knowledge of the economic prospects for teachers in regards to employment.

Due to the varying answer scales of the four questions related to this construct area (Q5-8), one question was chosen to represent the students' level of knowledge. Question 7 asked students if they believed that their first teaching position would be full time, part time or if they were unsure. Those who answered 'part time' are considered to have a good understanding of the economic prospects, 'unsure' an average understanding and 'full time' a poor understanding. A frequency was run on this variable to summarize

the data, as illustrated by Table 3. The results show that the majority of students (48.2%) have a good understanding of the economic prospects for teachers in regards to employment.

Table 3

Frequency Results for Survey Question 7

Sub-construct		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	F/T	11	12.9	21.2	21.2
	P/T	41	48.2	78.8	100
Valid	Total	52	61.2	100	
Missing	Unsure	33	38.8		
Total		85	100		

Note. F/T = Full time; P/T = Part time.

Further information regarding the results of this construct area can be determined by considering the results of survey question 8. If students answered ‘part time’ to question 7, they were then required to answer 8, which asked them how long they believed it would take to gain full time employment. ‘3-4 years’ or ‘5 years or more’ is considered a good understanding, ‘1-2 years’ is considered an average understanding and ‘7-12 months’ or ‘0-6 months’ is considered a poor understanding. A frequency was also run on this variable to summarize the data. The results showed that of the students who answered the question, 51.1% have an average understanding, followed by 35.6% with a good understanding and 13.3% with a poor understanding.

Students' knowledge of the HRSB teaching system.

Five survey questions (Q9-13) were averaged to create the sub-construct - Students' Level of Knowledge Regarding the HRSB Teaching System. The Alpha value of this construct was .77. As with the Reasons sub-constructs the same values were assigned to the answer labels. (Strongly disagree = 1, disagree = 2, agree = 3 and strongly agree = 4). A score of 4 equals a very good level of knowledge, ranging down to a 1, which equals a very poor level of knowledge. Descriptives were examined in order to understand the variability of the data. The results, which were widely dispersed, are illustrated in Table 4. The majority of students (34.2%) scored very close to halfway between agree and disagree. While some students did report a very good level of knowledge, the majority did not deviate far from the mean.

Table 4

Measure of Dispersion for HRSB Knowledge

Sub-construct	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
HRSB	85	1.4	4	2.55	0.56

Advantages students perceive they have in gaining teaching employment over others.

Two sub-constructs were created to summarize the information in this construct area. The Alpha value of this construct was .71. Survey questions 28-32 were combined to create a sub-construct representing the strength of students’ overall belief in their having any advantage in gaining employment over others. These survey questions included both real and unrealistic advantages. Survey questions 29, 31 and 32 were combined to create Real Advantages only. These two sub-constructs are referred to as Advantages and Real advantages respectively. Descriptives and frequencies were run in order to understand the variability and summarize the data. The measure of dispersion is presented in Table 5. The same values were assigned to the answer labels as with the HRSB and Reasons sub-constructs.

In regards to Advantages, the majority of students (82%) agreed or strongly agreed that they had an advantage of some sort. The results for Real Advantages in regards to the mean and standard deviation was nearly identical.

Table 5

Measure of Dispersion for Advantages and Real Advantages

Sub-construct	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Advantages	83	2	4	3.38	0.45
Real Advantages	83	1.5	4	3.32	0.54

Frequencies were also run separately on survey questions 27-32 in order to gain more detailed information regarding students' answers to the advantages questions. Some notable results were as follows:

The two advantages that more than 50% of the students strongly agreed with were 'I believe I will have an advantage because I am extremely motivated at determined' and 'I believe I will have an advantage because I am willing to substitute teach for as long as it takes to gain full time employment'. For the majority of advantages, no more than 12.2% of students ever disagreed or strongly disagreed with them. Speaking an additional language and having personal contacts within the profession were the two exceptions.

Correlations Between Construct Areas

A series of Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients and independent sample t-tests were run on the data in order to assess the relationships between the sub-constructs. There were six relationships to consider as illustrated in Figure 2. Overall very few significant relationships were discovered. The results of the analyses are reported below according to relationship number.

No significant differences were discovered suggesting that there is not a significant relationship between students' knowledge of the current economic prospects for teachers in Halifax and their reasons for wanting to become teachers. Specifically, students' knowledge of their job prospects is not impacted by, or related to their reasons for wanting to teach. It is worth noting however that while not statistically significant, the results do show that those students with a good knowledge of their job prospects are slightly less inclined to be teaching for extrinsic reasons. In addition, students with a poorer understanding of their job prospects are slightly less inclined to be teaching for reasons related to reform.

Relationship 2.

An independent sample t test was conducted to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the students in the 'good level of economic knowledge' group and the students in the 'poor level of economic knowledge' group and their belief in any advantages that they perceive they have over other others in gaining teaching employment.

Again, no significant differences were discovered suggesting that there is no significant relationship between students' knowledge of the economic prospects for teachers and their belief in any advantage that they perceive they have over others in gaining employment. Specifically, whether students believe that they do or do not have some advantage is unaffected by, or unrelated to their knowledge of their job prospects.

However while not statistically significant, the results do suggest that students with a poorer understanding of their job prospects feel slightly more strongly about possessing some advantage, whether realistic or not.

Relationship 3.

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between students' knowledge of the HRSB teaching system and their belief in any advantage that they feel they have over others in gaining employment.

No correlation was discovered between the sub-constructs indicating that there is no relationship between students' knowledge of the HRSB teaching system and their belief in having an advantage over others.

Relationship 4.

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between students' knowledge of the HRSB teaching system and their reasons for becoming teachers.

No correlation was discovered between the sub-constructs indicating that there is not a significant relationship between HRSB knowledge and reasons for teaching.

Relationship 5.

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between students' reasons for becoming teachers and their belief in any advantage that they feel they have over others in gaining employment.

Small correlations were discovered between the Advantages and Altruistic Reasons sub-constructs ($r = 0.324$, $n = 82$, $p = 0.003$), and between the Advantages and Intrinsic Reasons sub-constructs ($r = 0.318$, $n = 82$, $p = 0.004$). These results indicate that there is a small yet significant positive correlation between students' belief in having an advantage (whether real or not) and their reasons for teaching that are altruistic or intrinsic in nature.

Small correlations were also discovered between the Real Advantages and Altruistic Reasons sub-constructs ($r = 0.276$, $n = 82$, $p = 0.012$), and the Real Advantages and Intrinsic Reasons sub-constructs ($r = 0.269$, $n = 82$, $p = 0.015$). Similar to above, these results indicate that there is a slight yet significant positive correlation between students' belief in having an advantage (which is a proven real advantage) and their reasons for teaching that are altruistic or intrinsic in nature or related to reform.

Relationship 6.

An independent sample t test was conducted to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the students in the ‘good level of economic knowledge’ group and the students in the ‘poor level of economic knowledge’ group and their level of knowledge of the HRSB teaching system.

No significant differences were discovered suggesting that there is no significant relationship between students’ level of knowledge of the economic prospects for teachers and their level of knowledge of the HRSB teaching system. That said, while not statistically significant, the results do suggest that students with a better understanding of their job prospects have a marginally better understanding of the HRSB teaching system.

Further Analyses

A series of further analyses were run on the data to explore other significant relationships between variables as they pertain to the primary research question. Cross tabs were used to compare the categorical variables: age, sex, students’ belief in their ability to get a job, their expected time frame for gaining employment and whether they believe that their first job will be full time or part time. Independent sample t-tests and one-way ANOVAs were conducted between the categorical variables: sex and age and the continuous variables: HRSB knowledge, reasons for teaching and advantages.

Of these tests, only one returned statistically significant or meaningful results. This was the one-way ANOVA comparing the students' intrinsic reasons for teaching and the four age categories. There was a significant effect of age on intrinsic reasons at the $p < 0.05$ level for the four categories $F(3, 80) = 4.16, p = 0.009$. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for the 20-25 age group ($M = 3.45, SD = 0.49$) was significantly different than the 26-30 age group ($M = 2.98, SD = 0.61$), however the other two age groups did not differ significantly. These results suggest that students in the lower age bracket feel more strongly about their intrinsic reasons for teaching than the students in the next higher age bracket.

Qualitative Results

There were only eight responses to the final question of the survey which asked students 'is there anything you would like to tell us that we didn't ask?' Due to the small number, all responses have been included here, grouped according to construct area.

HRSB.

"I am in the first semester of my first year and believe this is why I am less knowledgeable about HRSB policies and terms." (Survey participant #80)

"I don't understand how the HRSB works at all." (Survey participant #17)

“My knowledge of the HRSB policies, substituting, aggregate etc are because of my contacts within the board NOT because of the BEd program.” (Survey participant #36)

Reasons for teaching.

“Family history with teaching, ie: following a parent who was a teacher and really liked how their life was based around this job.” (Survey participant #82)

Economic prospects.

“Really I am hoping to see more openings in the job market in the next few years as older teachers in the HRM retire. This will hopefully allow for more job opportunities for younger teachers.” (Survey participant #81)

“This is absolutely terrifying to think about! MORE JOBS!” (Survey participant #76)

“We have all heard how hard it will be to get into the HRSB as a teacher, so that affects my answers.” (Survey participant #57)

“Are we aware of the number of teachers graduating with ‘us’ (yr 2014)? How many ‘unemployed licensed’ teachers live in HRM?” (Survey participant #15)

The first two comments made in reference to the HRSB reinforce the statistical results that show a lack of knowledge of the teaching system. The comment made in regards to reasons for teaching indicates an answer option this student felt was lacking in the survey. The comments made regarding economic prospects indicate a range of knowledge levels and opinions.

Chapter 6: Discussion

The area of interest for this research study was the current oversupply of teachers in Halifax. In considering that one of the possible solutions to the oversupply would be the education of students and hence the voluntary reduction of new teachers entering the profession, the overall research question being addressed was: why are students still enrolling in teacher education courses in significant numbers at a time when the economic prospects for teachers are so poor? In considering the relationship between four key areas of knowledge, this study has attempted to answer the above question in order to provide useful information to students, those seeking to educate students and the teachers affected by the oversupply.

With no relationships of great significance discovered between the four key constructs, it could be concluded that for the Bachelor of Education (BEd) students, these four areas of knowledge are quite separate from each other. In relation to the research question, this leads to two key conclusions:

- Students' reasons for becoming teachers overrule any other knowledge they have regarding the teaching labour market; and
- There is a lack of comprehensive research done by students prior to their enrollment in BEd programs.

Students' Reasons for Becoming Teachers

The first conclusion suggests that students will continue to enroll in teacher education courses simply because they wish to be teachers. The nature of their reasons for teaching, and their level of knowledge of the other three constructs illustrate this point.

Students feel most strongly about becoming teachers for reasons not related to the practical side of teaching, such as pay or generous holidays, but rather for reasons related to the greater good (as it were) – such as helping others, creating a better society or fulfilling an inherent need. It would appear that for these students teaching is very much a vocation - a career that they feel well suited for, that is worthy and that requires great dedication. These results reflect those of similar studies (Thornton & Bricheno, 2002; Brookhart & Freeman, 1992).

In addition, students continue to enroll in teacher education programs despite the majority of them demonstrating a fairly accurate understanding of their job prospects upon graduating. It seems that knowing that they face one to five years of substituting work before they gain full time employment is not enough to deter them. This suggests that the desire to teach outweighs the knowledge of the guaranteed trials faced by all new teachers in Halifax.

Following from this, students self admittedly lacked confidence in their knowledge of the HRSB teaching system, and yet again they still continue to enroll in the BEd programs. As one student commented: “I don’t understand how the HRSB works at all.” (Survey participant #17) This would suggest that their motivations for becoming teachers do not stem from their knowledge of the system in which they intend to work. A question that could be asked here is: would their need to teach still outweigh all other considerations if they had a comprehensive understanding of the HRSB’s policies and practices? Assuming that a comprehensive understanding would enhance their knowledge of their job prospects, which is already fairly accurate, the reasonable answer is yes. Even if the students demonstrated a more thorough knowledge of the HRSB teaching system, it is likely that their desire to teach would still be their primary motivator.

Lastly is the students’ perception of what gives them an advantage over others in gaining employment. The most notable result here is that the majority of students do feel they have an advantage of some sort. However, with the exception of speaking an additional language there is not a clear distinction between students’ understanding of real and unreal advantages. As students may be unaware that they have a misunderstanding it cannot be reasonably argued that they are enrolling in their BEd’s knowingly ‘blind’ in this area of knowledge, and hence are motivated only by their reasons for teaching. However, an interesting connection can be made between the most popular advantages and the nature of their reasons for teaching.

The two advantages that the students felt most strongly about were related to determination and dedication. These advantages link most closely with the idea of teaching as a vocation - that is a career that requires self-efficacy and commitment. The popularity of these advantages therefore reinforces the nature of the students' reasons for teaching. For these students, teaching is a calling and their need to teach is powerful.

Students' Lack of Comprehensive Research

The second conclusion reached from this research study is that there is generally a lack of comprehensive research done by students prior to their enrollment in the BEd programs.

While the students clearly have some understanding of the current teacher labour market, the emphasis of this conclusion is on the lack of *comprehensive* understanding, as would be evidenced by an increased level of knowledge in three of the construct areas and the existence of connections between these areas.

As discussed earlier, the students demonstrated a fairly accurate understanding of their job prospects upon graduating in regards to employment type and time frame. However while it was fairly accurate, it could have been improved, suggesting that their knowledge was not gained through vigorous research, but more likely through exposure to popular media and their peers in the education world. Consider the comment made by one student "We have all heard how hard it will be to get into the HRSB as a teacher, so

that affects my answers.” (Survey participant #57) As demonstrated in the literature review, articles regarding teachers and the teaching labour market appear frequently in the media, and reference is often made to the struggles and typical career path faced by new teachers. Consider the recent example of the 2012 fall edition Herald Magazine that was education themed. One article focused solely on the struggles faced by a substitute teacher and reported intimidating statistics such as “... (only) 17% of substitutes were used on any given day last year” (Willick, 2012, p.38). It would be fair to suggest that anyone in the general populace with an interest in education or teaching (particularly BEd students) would have some level of understanding surrounding the difficulties faced by new teachers, due largely in part to the saturation of this topic in the media.

The lack of *comprehensive* research is evidenced primarily by students’ lack of knowledge of the HRSB teaching system and their misunderstandings of what is or is not an advantage in the race for a teaching job. There are several resources such as the most recent teaching supply and demand report and HRSB collective agreements that are widely available and provide a great deal of information regarding the teaching labour market (*NS Teacher Supply and Demand*, 2012; *Collective agreement between HRSB and NSTU*, 2011; *NSTU local collective agreement*, 2004). Had students accessed these or similar resources, it would be fair to suggest that their knowledge in these areas would have increased and/or been more accurate. Case in point, the following questions asked by one student would have been answered: “Are we aware of the number of teachers graduating with ‘us’ (yr 2014)? How many ‘unemployed licensed’ teachers live in HRM?” (Survey participant #15)

The lack of correlation between construct areas also illustrates the absence of comprehensive research. Let us assume students had been exposed to *all* the significant information pertaining to their future careers. Presumably as the level of knowledge in one construct area increased so too would the level of knowledge in another construct area and a relationship between the two would have become apparent. For example, as a student gains a greater understanding of the ‘term recall’ process combined with an understanding of the current number of ‘term teachers’ in Halifax in relation to the number of available positions, they would begin to understand how long it could take them to gain full time employment and that simply being determined may not be a realistic advantage.

Limitations

The primary limitation of this study is survey design, and is a threat to internal validity. Beyond the initial testing, this was the first time that the survey was used and the following flaws in the survey design could allow for other plausible explanations of the results:

- The five questions that assessed knowledge of the HRSB system did not assess actual knowledge, only self-assessed knowledge. There is obviously potential here for students to be wrong about how much they think they do or do not know. If

this study were to be repeated, this section of the survey should be designed to assess *actual* knowledge.

- Due to the wording, there was potential for students to misunderstand the questions relating to advantages. If they failed to read the introductory sentence and went straight to the numbered questions they may have understood to it mean, “I have the following...” as opposed to “I have the following *and* I believe it to be an advantage”. In future studies this section could be redesigned. In addition, this section should be expanded with more explicit advantages listed, similar to question 27 (‘I speak an additional language’). The other questions, such as ‘I have teaching related experience’ are arguably ambiguous, and the difference between these and question 27 is a possible explanation for the effect question 27 had on the statistical analysis.
- Students’ knowledge of the economic prospects for teachers was based on the results of one question. Internal validity would be greatly enhanced if the results were based on several questions. The questions pertaining to knowledge of economic prospects would need to be redesigned to have similar or identical answer scales.
- While the survey asked students if they intended to seek a teaching job within the HRSB, it didn’t explicitly state public schools only. There is a chance that students mistakenly believe that private schools within the Halifax Regional

Municipality are part of the HRSB. Thus this could affect the measured accuracy of their answers, as the economic prospects etc for teachers at private schools vary.

A second limitation and threat to the validity of the study was the timing of the survey. This survey was delivered to the students approximately one and a half months into the start of their program. This has the potential to bias the results due to new understandings or opinions the students may have been exposed to in the program. Therefore there is a chance that the results of the survey were not a true reflection of what the students' knew when they made the decision to enroll in the program.

The results of this study surrounding students' reasons for becoming teachers are strong due to the similarity of the results of previous studies done on the same topic (Thornton & Bricheno, 2002; Brookhart & Freeman, 1992). These results can be generalized to a wider population with confidence. The overall results of this study can be generalized to the greater student population of Nova Scotia due to the similarities between the school boards' collective agreements. However results generalized beyond the HRSB should be done with caution due to the different challenges faced by the rural school boards as described in the supply and demand report (*NS Teacher Supply and Demand*, 2012). External validity could be enhanced in future studies by increasing the population sample to include all BEd students in Nova Scotia.

There were no problems in the procedures of conducting the research, therefore the internal and external reliability of the study are strong.

Recommendations for Further Study

The recommendations for further study come from continued exploration of the original research question regarding student enrollment in the BEd programs.

A key conclusion of this study is that even with a good understanding of their job prospects upon graduating students continue to enroll in BEd programs simply because they wish to teach. However it has also been concluded that there is a lack of comprehensive research done by students prior to enrollment. Therefore the next logical step is to confirm whether or not a comprehensive understanding of the current teacher labour market could overrule a student's desire to teach and therefore deter them from pursuing a teaching career at this time. That is, is there a point in providing further education to students? This question is worthy of further research in order to support or rebut the findings of this study – that is that it is unlikely that students will stop voluntarily enrolling in BEd programs.

Following from this, while considering the results of this study, many more questions arose surrounding student knowledge, four of which are presented below. The exploration and answering of these questions would provide additional context to the results of this study, but more importantly they would provide useful information regarding the

question of whether or not students can be voluntarily deterred from enrolling in teaching courses.

1. How do students react to the barrage of media articles that paint a miserable picture for new teachers? Do these articles deter them? If not, why not? Is it because, as the results here suggest, each student simply believes that they are more determined than everyone else?
2. Prior to enrolling in a teaching course, to what extent do students consider other professions that could meet their intrinsic and altruistic needs? Does job availability factor into their decision making at all?
3. Do students have a realistic understanding of the life of a substitute teacher? More specifically the challenges faced by a substitute teacher in terms of unreliable work, day-to-day inconsistency and the disconnectedness from full time teaching. To what extent does a student's confidence in their dedication and determination diminish after experiencing substituting teaching?
4. To what extent do students understand the baby boomer fallacy? What effect does this have on their judgment of their employment prospects, and thus their decision to enroll in BEd courses?

Implications

Implications for students.

Students enrolled in BEd programs will continue to face fierce competition for jobs by a large number of peers who all feel equally dedicated and determined. Students therefore should consider doing one of the following. Either continue on their teaching career path but avoid disillusionment when it comes to income and lifestyle after graduation by conducting comprehensive research into the teaching labour market *prior* to enrolling in a BEd program. Or, consider carefully their reasons for teaching, such as why they are drawn to it as a vocation and consider the possibility that there may be alternative professions that will meet their needs.

Implications for the teaching labour market.

If there is to be a significant reduction in the number of new teachers entering the workforce it will not likely come from students *choosing* not to enroll in BEd programs. If reducing the number of new teachers *is* the solution to the current oversupply it will only come through forcible reduction, such as the limiting of university places or the limiting the number of new teacher certificates issued each year (the merits of which are a topic for another paper). If reducing the number of new teachers is *not* the solution to the current oversupply then we return to options such as increased funding or changes in the collective agreements that allow for merit based hiring systems, even in a time of

oversupply. Alternatively we are left to explore even more radical thinking, such as how the teaching profession operates at the grass roots level and consider options such as apprenticeship programs for new teachers.

Implications for teachers affected by the oversupply.

A generous supply of new teachers will continue for the foreseeable future and it would seem that there is not an immediate forthcoming solution to the current supply/demand imbalance. Teachers affected by the oversupply in the HRSB should either continue to persevere, build up their seniority as a substitute teacher, term teacher etc, and hope that they really are more determined than others, or they should cut their losses and consider other options open to them, such as further study, alternate professions or a change of location.

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Appendix A



Why Teacher Education? - A Survey

Instructions

- Please read each question carefully.
- Please answer all questions.

Definition of Terms

- *Teacher*: Working in a classroom within a school setting.
- *Full time*: Working 100% hours, five days a week.
- *Part time*: Working anything less than full time, including substitute teaching.
- *HRSB*: Halifax Regional School Board

1. I am:
 - a. Male
 - b. Female

2. I am:
 - a. 20-25 years
 - b. 26-30 years
 - c. 31-35 years
 - d. 36-40 years
 - e. 41years or more

Please check off (✓) the most appropriate box

	Yes	No	Unsure
3. Do you intend to seek a job as a teacher within a school at the completion of your program?			
4. Do you intend to seek a teaching job at a school within the Halifax Regional School Board?			
5. I believe I will be successful in gaining employment as a teacher (either full time or part time) at some point after the completion of my program			

6. I believe that I will gain employment as a teacher (either full time or part time) within the following time frame:
 - a. 0-1 month
 - b. 2-3 months
 - c. 4-6 months
 - d. 6 months or more

7. I believe my first teaching position will be:
- a. Full Time
 - b. Part Time
 - c. Unsure

8. If you answered *part time* to the question above, please answer the following:

I believe I will gain full time employment within the following time frame:

- a. 0-6 months
- b. 7-12 months
- c. 1-2 years
- d. 3-4 years
- e. 5 years or more

Please check off (✓) the most appropriate box

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Unsure
9. I am familiar with the hiring policies and practices of the HRSB					
10. I am familiar with the meaning of all or most of the HRSB's teacher classification terms, such as substitute, aggregate, term, probationary, permanent.					
11. I know how many terms a term-teacher must teach for before they can apply for a probationary or permanent position.					
12. I know what the HRSB job fair is.					
13. I know what 'term recall' means in regards to job vacancies.					

Please check off (✓) the most appropriate box
I want to become a teacher:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Unsure
14. Because I want to help children.					
15. Because I want to make a difference in children's lives.					
16. Because I want to contribute to society.					
17. Because I have always wanted to teach.					
18. Because I want a satisfying career.					
19. Because I want to be like a teacher from my past.					
20. Because teaching allows me to meet my lifestyle and career goals. (Holidays, pay, travel etc).					
21. Because I want to have professional autonomy. (Control over my day-to-day job)					
22. Because there is nothing else I really want to do.					
23. Because I want a job that makes a difference.					
24. Because I want to effect educational reform (change).					
25. Because I want to effect social/political reform (change).					
26. I want to become a teacher for a reason that is not mentioned above.					

Please check off (✓) the most appropriate box

I believe I will have an advantage in gaining employment as a teacher over other candidates because:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Unsure
27. I speak an additional language.					
28. I have teaching-related experience.					
29. I am willing to travel for work.					
30. I am extremely motivated and determined.					
31. I have contacts and/or personal connections within the profession.					
32. I am willing to substitute teach (if applicable) for as long as it takes to gain full time employment.					

Is there anything you would like to tell us that we didn't ask?
