

THE PROFESSIONAL STANDING OF THE REPLACEMENT TEACHER IN THE EDUCATION COMMUNITY: A COUNTRY REGION'S PERSPECTIVE

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Introduction

As Australian schools move towards the twenty-first century more attention is being drawn to the professionalism of teachers. This has led to the recent publication of two NBEET reports, Teacher Education in Australia (September 1990) and Australia's Teachers: A Blueprint for the 90's (January 1991). These reports recognise the need for a reconceptualisation and urgent action in regards to the initial training and continuing education of Australia's teachers. Each goes into considerable detail about the need, scope and format of programs of professional development, and each highlights the importance of Employer/Higher Education Institution co-operation in such programs.

The La Trobe University College of Northern Victoria and the Bendigo Regional Office of the Victorian Ministry of Education are in the process of developing this co-operation, especially in the post initial teacher education area. Through the Research Centre for Teacher Development at the La Trobe University College of Northern Victoria, a project is underway to develop this process in close consultation with, and the full co-operation of the Loddon Campaspe Mallee Regional Office. This paper reports on the initial outcome.

Fifty-eight Primary Replacement Teachers (RTs) responded to a questionnaire regarding their employment status, professional qualifications, days worked in 1989 and 1990, and their in-service involvement and in-service needs. The investigation was undertaken in order to provide local Ministry and University College personnel with information to assist in planning future in-service needs for this particular group of teachers.

In Victoria during 1990 the Ministry employed 40,000 teachers in primary, secondary and special schools. There is constantly a pool of 10,000 teachers on leave without pay from the Ministry. During the 1989-90 financial year 14,000 teachers were employed as Replacement Teachers in primary and secondary schools. Some of these Replacement Teachers came from the pool of teachers on leave without pay, but there is still a large group of teachers whose only source of employment is RT work.

The Replacement Teacher Project

The NBEET reports cited in the introduction went far towards promoting and supporting national innovations in initial and continuing teacher education, but neither mentioned the professional development needs of RTs in the various systems. The Research Team at the Centre for Teacher Development was concerned that some preliminary investigation was necessary which might form the base for the incorporation of the needs of RTs into any national or regional profile of teacher professional development.

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Overview of Past Replacement Teacher Provision

During the 1960's Victoria, along with other states experienced an unprecedented increase in student enrolments. As a direct result of the war years, there was not only a population increase, but also changes in Australian society including industrialisation and mass secondary education. The increase in the school population, not only stimulated interest in education, but also highlighted the crisis in student accommodation and teacher supply. As an outcome there were increasing demands placed on the Government to improve conditions.

During this change in society many pressure groups were formed to help lobby for change in education. Teacher organisations became very important, particularly in the 1960s, in pressuring the Government to improve conditions in schools. At the same time, parent groups also became involved in the education debate. Within this context, the question of short term teacher replacement was raised. Previous to this, little provision had been provided for dealing with short-term teacher absences. As a consequence two major categories of relief teachers were created for each educational district.

The first category was called District Relievers. These teachers were based within each district, and were employed on a full-time basis to cover teacher absences. The second category was called Emergency Teachers. Instead of being employed at the district level, these people were employed by individual schools if a District Reliever was unavailable. Emergency Teachers were qualified teachers who were not employed as fulltime teachers. They were paid either on a half-day or full-day basis. The responsibility for finding the Emergency Teachers was placed on the schools themselves. Many schools found this to be difficult.

With the establishment of educational regions during the late seventies, Emergency Teachers became a regional responsibility. This responsibility included all administration and placement of relief teachers, both relieving and emergency staff. A pool of Emergency Teachers was established and schools notified the regions of their needs. The regions accepted their responsibility in this field and every endeavour was made to meet the schools' requests. An additional aspect of the regional endeavour was the provision of in-service programs for Emergency Teachers. Many of these teachers had not been actively involved in education for some time and curricula in schools had changed. Several regions recognised this fact and established in-service programs that would provide a knowledge and understanding of current educational initiatives. They believed this would help provide consistency within the classroom programs.

During the late 1970s consultants in the Horsham Region planned in-service programs for Emergency Teachers. The duration of each program was three days, and they provided an overview of current teaching methodologies, along with practical ideas for implementation. Similar programs existed in most regions and appeared to be highly successful from both the Emergency Teachers' and classrooms teachers' perspectives. Classroom teachers became involved in order to help overcome the need to explain their programs to these relief teachers. These programs were initiated by the regions when they also had control over in-service funding. The in-servicing of Emergency Teachers as members of the education profession was then seen as being important. With the advent of school based decision making, schools no longer applied to the regions for in-service days. Professional development or in-service is now school based. Since this time in-services for Emergency Teachers have declined, although educational initiatives still emerge.

During the last decade, the only documentation on Emergency Teachers relates to conditions of employment. Various memos from the Ministry since 1984 relate to the use of Emergency Teachers, duties and payments. A memorandum from the Chief Manager (Collins, 1988)

illustrates clearly the current concerns with Emergency Teachers. It outlines a pilot program for school-based management of Emergency Teachers. This is a proposal that addresses the increased demand for Emergency Teachers. Schools are granted funds based on their previous average use to spend on Emergency Teachers. If schools choose not to spend this allotment on Emergency Teachers, they are able to use the money for other purposes. However, it does not address the curriculum issues that are a vital component of today's educational emphasis. This recent development seems at odds with the initial rationale for the employment of Emergency Teachers: improvement of student and teacher conditions.

The change of name from Emergency Teachers to Replacement Teachers evolving since 1990, seems to have no bearing on the status of this group of educators or their professional development needs. The questions that clearly emerge are:

1. Do Replacement Teachers need this knowledge?

or

2. Is it an oversight in today's educational planning?

Initial Development of the Project

To support NBEET focus on the "Quality of Teaching" within the education sector this project has as its emphasis the role and the function of the RT within the education system. To achieve this, the Research Team believed it was essential to develop a profile of Primary RTs within the Loddon Campaspe Mallee region. These schools were chosen as a network servicing the La Trobe U.C.N.V., Faculty of Education teacher education programs. With the current changes in the Victorian education system, the Research Team wished to examine the processes or avenues available for the updating and development of the expertise currently held by RTs.

The Ministry of Education Regional Office personnel were invited to participate in the project. The Research Team believed that they would be able to provide the latest information on the Ministry's approach to in-servicing of RTs, as well as outlining the provision of access and dissemination of current policy documentation for the RT. Currently, the Regional Office does not include RTs as an integral part of the Professional Development program for our region. Concern at this situation was expressed by the Research Team which felt that research of this kind was needed to enable informed employer decisions on long-term and short-term professional development plans.

Prior to the development of the questionnaires, meetings were held with the local branch of the Emergency Teachers' Association. Discussions centred on their perceived role, problems and needs within the schools' system. Also considered was their own professional development as well as the amount of emphasis placed on their professional development by their employing body.

Investigations revealed that the Ministry of Education had focussed on publishing policy documents in relation to the employment of RTs (Collins, 1988). There appeared to be no other current material produced by the Ministry to assist RTs with curriculum information, school policies and procedures, new curriculum trends or recent teaching strategies pertaining to curriculum innovation.

A review of current literature revealed that there was no information available in Australia which presented a clear profile of RTs. There appeared to be no studies done to examine the expectations of RTs as held by school principals, peer teachers, parents and students. The literature indicates

that some studies of RTs had been carried out in the U.S.A. (Bontempo and Deay, 1986). However, these studies were focussed on local issues relevant to particular school districts and did not address the wider issues involved with this study. The Research Team was concerned that there appeared no discussion within the literature in relation to professional development needs of the RT.

Aims of the Project

The focal questions used to guide the research were derived as a result of discussions with members of the local branch of the Emergency Teachers' Association. This group of teachers expressed concern regarding their role within the education system as a whole. This concern was focussed on their professional standing as teachers within the educational community. Such issues as professional development and access to the dissemination of current directions and policies of the Ministry were raised by this group. As a consequence, the following questions were used to guide the study:

1. What is the professional status of the RT within the education system?
2. How are the professional development needs of the RT being met?
3. What opportunities are available for RTs to be informed of and respond to current Ministry policy and documents?

Project Research Methodology

The research group believed that to answer these questions a sampling of relevant members of the local education community in a pilot study was needed.

The initial phase used quantitative data collection which would be followed by qualitative analysis. The following groups were targeted:

- a) **School Principals.** As the initial contact person for the RT, principals have particular responsibilities in ensuring that RTs are successful within the school setting. Principals exercise control over the employment of the RTs and their views were sought on determining the role of the RT within the school, comparisons with the role of the classroom teacher and the provision for in-servicing the RT.
- b) **Classroom Teachers.** Classroom teachers are in the position to both plan RT sessions when notified absences occur and to follow up RT programs. This group was questioned to determine expectations of the RT. Views were also sought to determine the classroom teachers' perception of the RT within the education profession.
- c) **Students.** Views into the classroom performance of the RT were sought from students in the upper primary grades. The Research Team believed that this group would provide supportive material to the wider perspective of the RT in the education profession.
- d) **Replacement Teachers.** Information was sought from the wider community of RTs within the region, to determine if the views expressed by the meeting of the Emergency Teachers' Association were widely held. The Research Team believed it was necessary to provide the opportunity for the RTs to answer the same questions as put to the Principals and Classroom Teachers. This was an attempt to provide as comprehensive a picture as possible.

To obtain this information a four part questionnaire was developed by the Research Team for use with Principals, Classroom Teachers and RTs. The questionnaire was designed so that all participants would be able to address common issues.

Introductory Questionnaire - for RTs, to develop a profile of their background.

Questionnaire No. 1 - for Principals, Classroom Teachers and RTs. This questionnaire focussed on the school environment that RTs operate in and the role that principals and classroom teachers adopt in relation to the RT.

Questionnaire No. 2 - for Classroom Teachers and RTs. This questionnaire focussed on expectations between RTs and classroom teachers.

Questionnaire No. 3 - was answered by RTs. This questionnaire focussed on RT professional development.

A further questionnaire, designed to address students' perceptions of RTs, focussed on the worth of RT days.

Regional Office personnel were interviewed to determine the Ministry of Education's responsibilities in relation to in-servicing of RTs and processes used to ensure all RTs were aware of current directions, for example frameworks implementation, and policy documentation which affected them.

Distribution of Questionnaires

Permission was sought and granted from the Victorian Ministry of Education to use La Trobe U.C.N.V. Faculty of Education training schools as sources of information. Letters were sent to all principals seeking co-operation in this study. Supervising U.C.N.V. lecturers personally delivered the questionnaires to the principals. Second and third year undergraduate Diploma of Teaching (Primary) students were asked to distribute the classroom teachers' questionnaires to their supervising teachers. Students, who were teaching Year 4, 5, and 6 classes, volunteered to administer the students' questionnaire. Questionnaires were sent to all people listed on the regions' RT register.

This distribution method resulted in a high response rate of approximately 85% in the case of the school principals, classroom teachers and students. The response rate achieved with RTs was approximately 60%.

Profile of Replacement Teachers in Pilot Study

Profiles of RTs were compiled considering two main areas:

1. background work experience, age and qualifications,
2. participation in recent professional development and perceived needs.

Age Groupings

This survey covers a period which has seen changes to the entry qualifications of Primary Teachers. Prior to 1972, teachers entered the profession with either a two or three-year qualification. However to move through to Principal classification, a four-year qualification was necessary. From 1972 beginning teachers have been three-year trained, but they still require a fourth year of training for Principal classification.

TABLE 1
AGE RANGE AND SEX OF RTS

AGE RANGE	MALE	FEMALE
21 - 30	1	13
31 - 40	0	14
41 - 50	1	21
51 - 55	0	0
Above 55	3	0
Total (58)	5	53

Qualifications

As the pool of RTs within the surveyed region consisted of a range of people of various ages, the Research Team believed that the different concerns and considerations may have been expressed depending on length of experience. To answer the research questions posed, information sought included such areas as initial qualifications; upgrading of qualifications; amount of work obtained; participation in in-service activities and in-service needs.

TABLE 2
INITIAL QUALIFICATION BASED ON AGE GROUPS

AGE GROUP	INITIAL QUALIFICATION	NO. OF RTS
21 - 30	3 year trained	14
31 - 40	2 year trained	3
	3 year trained	11
41 - 50	2 year trained	9
	3 year trained	13
51 - 55	2 year trained	2
	3 year trained	3
Above 55	2 year trained	3
Total		58

From the introductory questionnaire an accurate view of the RTs initial training and subsequent upgrading was obtained (See Table 3). As can be seen in column 2, the emphasis on ensuring that primary teachers are three-year trained has occurred during the last eighteen years. The small number of two-year trained people in the 31-40 age group have all subsequently upgraded to three or four-year trained. Table 3 shows that of the thirty teachers over forty years, fourteen (47%) were initially two-year trained. Of this group of fourteen teachers, eight (57%) have upgraded from their original two-year trained status. Of the sixteen teachers over forty years who were initially three year trained, only five (31%) have gained a fourth year qualification.

TABLE 3
UPGRADING OF QUALIFICATIONS BY AGE GROUPS

AGE GROUP	INITIAL QUALIFICATION	UPGRADED INITIAL QUALIFICATIONS	HAVE QUALIFICATION AS AT 1990		
			2 YEAR	3 YEAR	4 YEAR
21 - 30 (14)	3 year trained	3		11	3
31 - 40 (14)	2 year trained	3		2	1
	3 year trained	1		10	1
41 - 50 (22)	2 year trained	4	5	2	2
	3 year trained	4		9	4
51 - 55 (5)	2 year trained	1	1		1
	3 year trained	1		2	1
Above 55 (3)	2 year trained	3			3
TOTAL	58	20	6	36	16

Within the younger group comprising twenty-eight teachers under forty years, the number who have not upgraded their initial training qualification is even higher. Within the age groups (21-30 and 31-40), twenty-three (82%) of the teachers have not gained a fourth year qualification. However, included within this figure are two, two-year trained RTs who have upgraded, but only to three-year status.

An examination of Table 4 reveals that of the forty-two teachers who are not fully qualified (four-year trained), thirty-four (81%) are not presently engaged in study. Included in this group are the six, two-year trained RTs.

TABLE 4
RTS NOT STUDYING BY AGE GROUP

AGE GROUP	NUMBER NOT 4 YEAR TRAINED 1990	NOT STUDYING
21 - 30	11	9
31 - 40	12	6*
41 - 50	16	16
51 - 55	3	3
Above 55	0	0

* Five teachers in the 31-40 age group commenced study in 1990 after a break of fifteen or more years.

An examination of the average length of time since gaining the last formal qualification (See Table 5) clearly shows the lack of recent upgrading occurring by certain age groups. The length of time for the 21 - 30 age group is explained by the raw data which indicates that 35% of the fourteen completed initial training during the last three years. The Research Team would draw particular attention to the 41-50 age group. This group has the highest length of time, as a whole group, from receiving formal training, but at the same time is the group obtaining the greatest amount of work (See Table 6). A closer examination of the data for this group revealed that three of the five two-year trained RTs had not indicated any professional development activities in the form of in-service days. Of the nine teachers still with their original three year qualification, seven have not been involved with in-service activities.

TABLE 5
AVERAGE NUMBER OF YEARS SINCE LAST QUALIFICATION GAINED BY AGE GROUPS

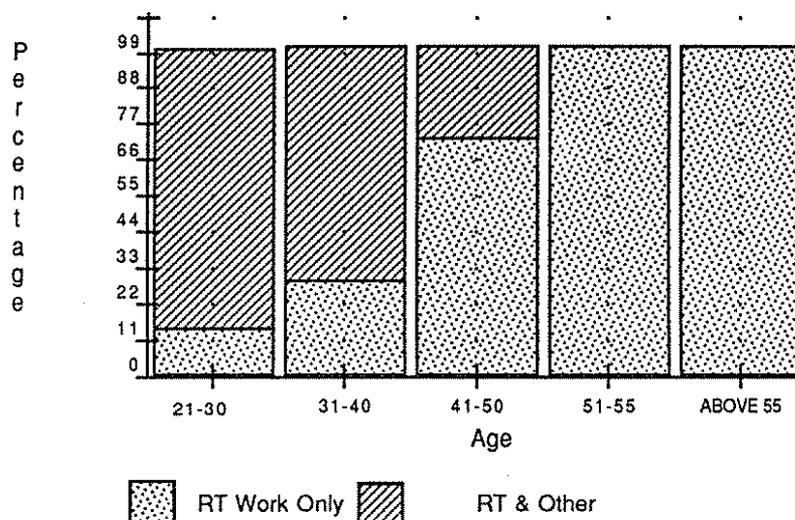
AGE GROUP	AVERAGE NUMBER OF YEARS SINCE LAST GAINED A QUALIFICATION
21 - 30 (14)	2.1 years
31 - 40 (14)	14.6 years
41 - 50 (22)	21.1 years
51 - 55 (5)	19.4 years
Above 55 (3)	16.6 years

Employment

A particular focus of the survey centred on whether those teachers who were actively working as RTs wanted to continue in this role or seek more permanent work as fulltime classroom teachers. The response to this question gave a very clear distinction between different age groups. For the 41 - 50, 51 - 55 and above 55 age groups, nearly all of these teachers were only seeking to work as RTs.

This was not the case for the two younger age groups. By far the majority of the teachers in these groups were actively seeking more permanent teaching (See Figure 1).

FIGURE 1
RTS' WORK PREFERENCES BY AGE GROUPS



This response may have been influenced by the amount of RT work that particular age groups were actually doing. As can be seen in Table 6 the 41-50 age group is the biggest group in terms of the amount of days worked. The figures for the 51-55 and above 55 age group may not be significant due to the small number of responses in these groups that were received.

TABLE 6

AVERAGE NUMBER OF DAYS WORKED BY RTS
OVER TWO YEARS BY AGE GROUP

AGE GROUP	AVERAGE NUMBER OF DAYS PER RT OVER 2 YEARS
21 - 30 (14)	43
31 - 40 (14)	69
41 - 50 (22)	100
51 - 55 (5)	61
Above 55 (3)	53

When the number of days employed is matched against the average time since the RTs last studied, there appear to be some links. The 41-50 age group is the group which is the least involved with studying for upgrading of qualifications, yet it is the group which is used the most in terms of RT work.

The Research Team believes that the criteria used to employ RTs may not be based on academic qualifications.

1. Are other qualities important to the principals who employ these people?
2. Are such criteria as personal qualities and convenience used to decide which RTs to employ?
3. Is professionalism judged according to experience rather than academic qualifications?

These questions are the focus of later reports.

Professional Associations

In terms of being active within a professional association, the 41-50 age group is once again dominant. Over 70% of this group are involved with teacher unions or the RT association. Even though this is a group not actively seeking fulltime work they still see themselves as being involved in the profession.

TABLE 7
MEMBERSHIP OF PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS BY AGE GROUPS

ASSOCIATION	AGE RANGE				
	21-30 Raw (%)	31-40 Raw (%)	41-50 Raw (%)	51-55 Raw (%)	Above 55 Raw (%)
V.T.U.	1 (7.1)	3 (21.4)	7 (31.8)	0 (0)	1 (33.3)
RTs Association	2 (14.3)	1 (7.1)	8 (36.4)	4 (80)	0 (0)
T.F. of Victoria	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (4.6)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Other	0 (0)	2 (14.3)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)

Recent In-service Involvement

RTs were asked to provide information about their involvement in recent in-service education programs. Information was sought regarding RTs' involvement with Ministry based, school based and college based in-service. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they were:

1. notified of in-service programs
2. asked to attend in-service programs
3. asked to help plan in-service programs.

The responses for this section were examined as a whole group rather than breaking them down into age groups.

TABLE 8
RTS' INVOLVEMENT WITH IN-SERVICE PROGRAMS
EITHER MINISTRY, SCHOOL OR COLLEGE BASED

	YES	NO
Ministry - notified	2%	98%
- invited to attend	2%	98%
- invited to help plan	0%	100%
School - notified	20%	80%
- invited to attend	25%	75%
- invited to help plan	3%	97%
College - notified	2%	98%
- invited to attend	2%	98%
- invited to help plan	2%	98%

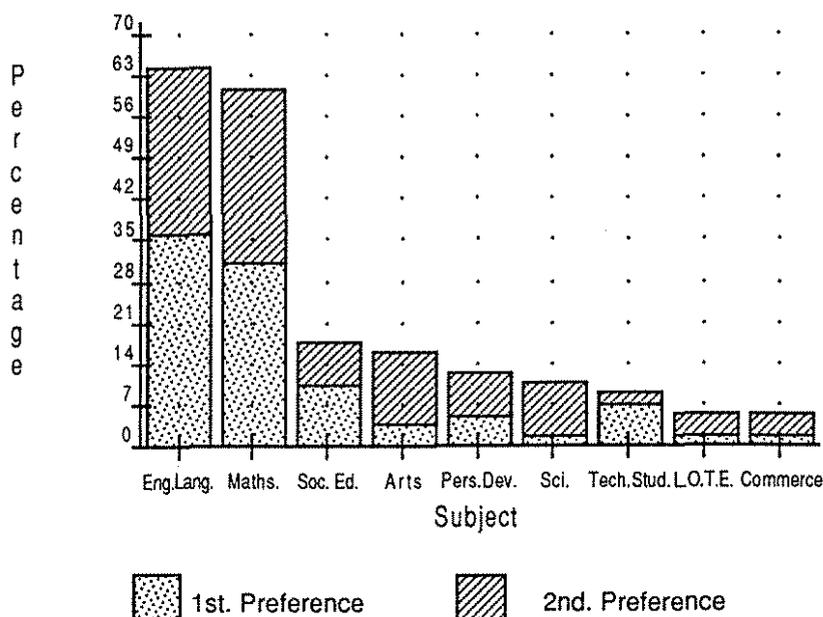
As has been seen from Table 8, RTs had appeared not to be involved with much in-service activity. When asked if they felt that their in-service needs were taken as seriously as full time teachers, they responded overwhelmingly in the negative (98% No, 2% Yes).

The Research Team points out that this data did not indicate how long each individual had been acting as an RT, and therefore did not determine what in-service activities had been undertaken if he/she had been previously employed as a fulltime teacher.

Inservice Needs

RTs were asked which of the Frameworks areas they would be most interested in exploring through in-service courses. The Research Team would draw attention to the demand for in-service activities in Maths and English. See Figure 2 which shows combined first and second preferences by percentage.

FIGURE 2
RTS' PREFERENCES FOR IN-SERVICE ACTIVITIES

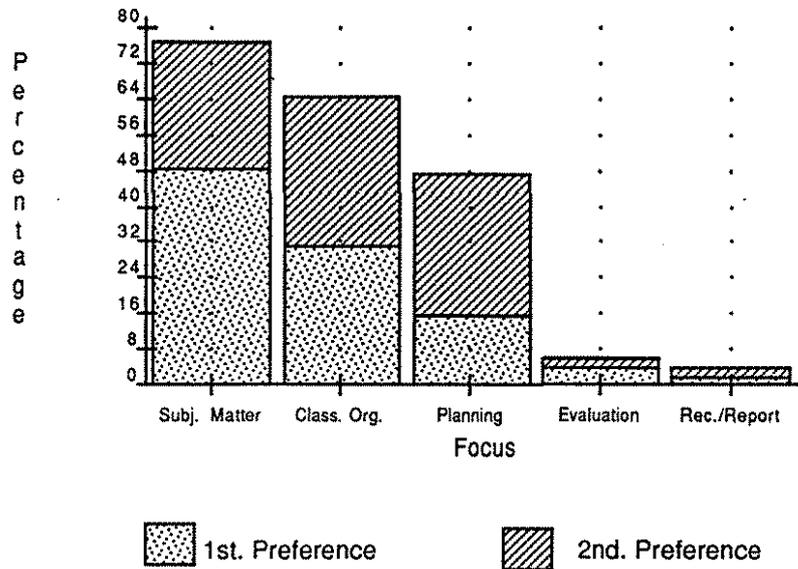


Emphasis was placed on determining RTs needs in regard to particular areas of updating they believed important. They were asked to nominate their preferred focus of study, such as subject matter, planning, classroom organisation, evaluation and recording/reporting.

Figure 3 indicates that updating subject matter was important to RTs. This would appear to correspond with Figure 2.

FIGURE 3

RTS' PREFERENCES FOR PARTICULAR FACETS OF TEACHING



A considerable amount of interest was expressed in special focus areas. These focus areas related to important initiatives put forward by the Ministry in recent years. RTs were asked if they would be interested in studying gender issues, justice, equal opportunities and home/school relationships. Their responses are shown in Table 9. The interest in the home/school relationships is particularly high, and future in-service initiatives for RTs should take active cognisance of this.

TABLE 9

RTS' PREFERENCES IN RELATION TO CURRENT ISSUES

	YES	NO
1. gender issues	39%	61%
2. justice	54%	46%
3. equal opportunities	56%	44%
4. home/school relationships	82%	18%

The research team sought information from the RTs in relation to what they believed to be the appropriate in-service formats: Ministry based, School based or College based. Table 10 indicates their preference by percentage. A preference for school based, weekday workshops was clearly indicated. Weekend and holiday workshops were not regarded highly.

TABLE 10

RTS' PREFERENCES IN RELATION TO IN-SERVICE FORMATS

	MINISTRY BASED	SCHOOL BASED	COLLEGE BASED
Weekday workshops	55%	64%	55%
Weekend workshops	22%	17%	28%
After school workshops	38%	41%	38%
Holiday workshops	19%	17%	17%

When asked about costs of in-service, the RTs suggested that costs should be incurred by:

1. The Ministry 48% agreed
2. RTs themselves 10% agreed
3. Shared between the Ministry and RTs 53% agreed

This final observation indicated the reluctance on the part of the RTs to carry the burden of their own in-service costs, but a general willingness to share costs with the Ministry.

Summary

The role of the RT within our education system has become increasingly important since the time of their inception. To the present time this pool of teachers represents approximately 15% of the total teaching population. The study has indicated that the RTs who obtain most of the work are not fully qualified and are not actively seeking to up-grade initial qualifications. In conjunction with not up-grading, RTs as a group are also not involved in in-service activities as part of professional development.

This paper marks the initial stage of the RT project. The next stage is to examine ways and means of producing specialist courses to ensure that RTs are active members of the teaching profession. The outcome of the next stage will be reported at a later date.

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