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# **CONTRIBUTION OF RESEARCH TO IMPROVEMENT OF ADULT EDUCATION QUALITY**

**Aleksandra Pejatović, Regina Egetenmeyer, Maria Slowey (Eds.)**

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# RECENT STUDIES OF TEACHERS' CAREER DEVELOPMENT, FROM METHODOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The goal of this paper is presentation of new research contributions on teachers' career cycle from the perspective of the applied methodology. The paper also describes main results of the researches, out of which we learn about the course of change in teachers' professional development, attitudes towards change, perceptions of relationships to students and factors that contribute maintaining commitment during career. The results can contribute well to the creation of the programs for teacher in-service education, having in mind their educational needs at different stages of the career, varying attitude towards introduction of the innovations into the practice and stimulating characteristics of school environment. We conclude that quantitative research opens topics for qualitative research that offers insight into the stories and description of the context, while qualitative researches facilitate quantitative ones that can give more certain predictions, offer possibility of generalization and control of different relevant variables.

**Key words:** teacher, career development, professional life cycle, teacher's career development

## Teachers' career development

Since teachers represent particularly important professional group, group that influences knowledge attainment, skills development, values shaping, interests discovery and ambitions creation of many generations of children, scientific interest in studying this profession from different perspectives has always been great. If we want to study teachers from the perspective of their occupation, one of the most important topics we should focus on is the professional life cycle of teachers, or teachers' career cycle. Professional life cycle must show large inter-

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individual variance, due to individual differences, important events and surrounding characteristics. Still, researchers succeed to find some regularity in the course of changes in this field, which is why we can speak about career cycle, or stages of a career.

There are different theoretical models that define teachers' career cycle constructed more than three decades ago (Fuller, 1969; Burke, Fessler and Christensen, 1984; Sikes, 1985; Huberman, 1989). The topic was reapproached in more recent years and new models were constructed by Dall'Alba & Sanberg in 2006 and Day, Sammons, Stobart, Kington & Gu in 2007. In this article we have chosen older and newer theoretical models to rely on – Huberman's (1985), Fessler's (Burke et al., 1984 and Fessler, 1995) and the model offered by Day and associates (2007), all of them of considerable influence. In order to grasp a picture of the utility of these scientific contributions we can refer to citation frequency of these authors' works. Article *Professional life cycle of teachers* by Huberman (1989) has been cited 793 times, and *The teacher career cycle: Understanding and guiding the professional development of teachers* by Fessler and Christensen (1992) 242 times according to Google scholar. Results of extensive research VITAE, published in *Variations in teachers' work, lives and effectiveness* Dey, Stobart, Sammons, Kington, Gu (2006) has achieved 162 citations till this moment. The components in common for all the models, are: connecting career cycle to chronological age and years of service; describing work behavior– responsibilities that teacher tend to accept during the stages and their professional self in different stages; and describing psychological state of being– concerns, preoccupations, emotional state (Maskit, 2011). Therefore, through the offered models we can follow the characteristics of changes during career on three levels – cognitive, motivational and emotional, because they reflect on how teacher perceive their job and themselves in the professional framework, how they behave and how they feel considering the professional aspect of their life.

The aim of this paper is to get insight into several research contributions concerning teachers' career cycle, and answer the following questions:

- what methodological approach do they use?
- what are the strong and the weak aspects of the applied methodologies?
- how is the career cycle operationalized?
- what insights have we obtained into teachers' career cycle through these works?

By giving answers to these questions, we have the intention in the first place to offer some good examples for studying career cycle of teachers, to help conceiving new researches of this important theme, as well as to offer review of some relevant research results about teachers professional lives and professional development – to teachers themselves and to other individuals interested in the quality of teacher education and practice.



## Methodology

In this study, we analyze four empirical researches of teachers' career that shed light on the hypothesis about teacher career cycle offered by three theoretical models – Huberman's, Fessler's and the model given by Day and associates. Through searching *Google Scholar* (key words: *Huberman, Fessler, Day, Teacher Career Development*) for the articles published in English language for the period 2011 to 2015, we have chosen articles that apply different methodological approaches and originate from different countries. The gathered articles were analyzed in terms of methodology (methodological approach – Qualitative-quantitative, paradigm – critical pedagogy/phenomenological-interpretative/positivist; method: experiment, survey, case study, ethnography, phenomenology, narrative analysis etc.; data collection techniques – questionnaire, interview, focus groups, observation; and sample characteristics) and in terms of content (main results concerning teacher career cycle). This kind of analysis might be useful in the first place to inspire researchers to reflect on the methodological approaches they are using, and to facilitate future research of teacher career cycle, having in mind well established theoretical background.

### Presentation of researches and discussion on applied methodological approaches

In the table below we present a review of researches we will analyze for the purpose of our study.

Topic	Country	Approach	Paradigm	Method	Data collection	Sample
Professional development during career cycle	Germany	quantitative	positivist	survey	questionnaire	N=1939 secondary school teachers
Attitude towards pedagogical change in various stages of cycle	Israel	quantitative with qualitative elements	positivist with elements of interpretative	survey	Two questionnaires, self identification of teachers, interview	N=520, teachers from primary schools, junior high schools, and high schools
Teacher-pupil relationship across career	UK	qualitative with quantitative elements	interpretative	narrative analysis	interview	N=30 primary school, different length of service
Resisting career plateau	USA	qualitative	interpretative	Phenomenological research	interview	N=4 veteran secondary teachers

### Quantitative researches:

*First research: Professional development across the teaching career:  
Teachers' uptake of formal and informal learning opportunities  
(Richter et al., 2011)*

*Theoretical background*– Huberman's career stage model is used to derive hypothesis about uptake of professional development opportunities (Huberman, 1989).

*Operationalization of career cycle* – The authors do not measure if the characteristics of particular stages are present, but take the age of the respondents as criterion, referring to its correlation to career cycle.

*Goal* – To describe how teachers at different age use professional development opportunities, having in mind formal and informal learning and its content as well as work engagement and demographic characteristics of respondents.

### Methodological approach

This is a quantitative research relying on positivist paradigm, searching into relationships of variables on a large sample, with intention to find regularities and make generalizations.

Participants were selected from a nationally representative sample of 198 secondary schools, making 1939 teachers all together – which makes about 10 teachers per school. Teachers participated on voluntary bases in the research and questionnaires were administered by school principal. This big sample has provided high range of variation in age, thus representing all age groups, which is particularly important, since the age is main predictor variable. Still, it would be even more informative to know the proportion of teachers who have participated and who have not, and their relevant characteristics. The authors have used two potentially mediating variables – *work engagement*, defined as “motivational disposition to progress in the career and willingness to invest resources to achieve this goal” (Richter et al, 2011: 119) and *additional professional responsibilities* – which helps overcoming this weak point. Namely, we could imagine, for example, that the volunteers to participate in the research might be the individuals with more professional agility and motivation for professional development. By adding these variables between the age as independent and the uptake of professional development as dependent variable, we get cleaner picture of real effects of respondents' age. The same comment applies to demographic control variables the authors have introduced.

For data collection in this survey authors use a questionnaire, with an open-ended question about formal in-service activities in last two years. After teachers had numbered all the formal professional development activities, two trained independent raters had task to categorize them by their content. The inter-subjec-

tive agreement between their rates was calculated, achieving a satisfying degree. Informal activities were measured through 4 point Likert scale for two indicators – teacher cooperation and reading literature. Variable *Work engagement* was operationalized through teachers' answers on *Occupational Stress and Coping Inventory* and the internal consistency of the instrument was satisfying. Additional professional responsibilities were assessed through an open-ended question and answers to the question were coded as dummy variable.

### Findings about teachers' career cycle

There is a recognizable pattern in the participation of teachers in different moments of their career. The correlation between age and participation in formal in-service professional development takes nonlinear shape, being at its highest in mid career, during the stage of *experimentation and activism* (Huberman, 1989). Informal development through cooperation with colleagues takes linear shape, and gets less frequent with age. We can interpret this result with characteristics of Huberman's (1989) *survival and discovery stage* – teachers in the beginning of their career search for support and opportunities to learn from more experienced colleagues. Finally, late career teacher are more inclined to learn through reading than younger colleagues. Generally speaking, we can conclude that educational needs change during career cycle; and, as authors state, there is not an overall decrease of activities and engagement with age. Also, work engagement and additional responsibilities were confirmed to be mediating variables, and teachers with higher scores on them were participating more frequently in in-service learning.

#### *Second research: Teachers' attitudes toward pedagogical changes during various stages of professional development (Maskit, 2011)*

*Theoretical background:* Eight-stage model of teachers' career cycle (Burke, Christensen, Fessler, McDonnell & Price, 1987; Fessler, 1992, according to Maskit, 2011).

*Goal:* To explore to what extent teachers' attitudes towards pedagogical changes (teaching strategies that concern students, content and educational orientation) depend on the stages of their career development.

*Operationalization of career cycle:* The six stages that refer to practicing teachers are included in the study – *induction, competency building, enthusiasm and growth, career frustration and career wind-down*.

### Methodological approach

This is a mainly quantitative research, which applies a qualitative technique in order to make data validation. It tends to describe attitudes prevailing in categories of teachers designed according to theoretically defined career stages.

Participants (N=520) were teachers working at different levels of education – primary schools, junior high and high schools, in different ethnic backgrounds (Jewish schools, 455 teachers and Arabic schools, 65 teachers). By the selection of sample we recognize the author's intention to make extended conclusions, and we understand that the socio-cultural background might play role in determining professional behavior and job attitude during career.

There were four instruments used for data collection – *A questionnaire of attitudes toward pedagogical changes* – that assesses an overall attitude towards pedagogical change, participants answer on a 4 point Likert scale. Author has checked content validity with help of experts in the relevant area; internal consistency of the questionnaire was proved to be satisfactory. Second questionnaire was *Questionnaire of semantic differential*, where the attitude towards pedagogical changes was assessed through teachers' answers on 7 point Likert scale containing descriptions of their attitudes through pairs of contrasting adjectives; reliability calculated through internal consistency was acceptable. Third instrument measures the stage of career development of respondents – they read the descriptions of stages given in detail and evaluate which stage corresponds best to their situation. In this place we get insight into the *operationalization of career cycle* in this study. It is worth noticing that the researcher does not check the validity of the instrument, she relies at the theoretical models and asks from the participants to sort themselves in the described categories. We can see the reason for this approach – the author wishes to see the typical attitudes of teachers being at different stages of the cycle. Still, in this way we might lose information on the variability in professional behavior, for example, some teachers might perceive that characteristics of more than one stage correspond to their current state, which could offer even richer information on relations between career cycle and attitude towards pedagogical changes. Finally, the author has used open interviews for data validation; 50 respondents were selected and interviewed regarding their attitudes towards pedagogical changes, referring to their most recent experience in introducing change. We consider this final part of data collection rather valuable – first because it refers to concrete experience and teachers can recall easily their feelings and problems, therefore the obtained statements are getting more accurate and reliable. Also, it gives us a vivid picture of variety of activities and teachers' reactions to them.

### Findings about teachers' career cycle

Based on the results, author has succeeded to make profile of teachers in certain career stage considering their attitude towards pedagogical changes. The most positive attitude is present at stages *competency building* and *enthusiasm and growth*, and less positive in *career frustration* and *wind-down*. The author explains that during stages of *competency building* and *enthusiasm and growth*, teachers search for challenge, innovation, and show increased efficacy and pro-

professional consciousness. The motivation, satisfaction and commitment change over the cycle. In the *wind-down* stage we “hear” statements of teachers who feel tired of introducing new practices, don't wish to experiment any more through application of new methods. Moderate attitude towards change in the *induction* stage can be understood by lower self-efficacy and feeling of insecurity that beginning teachers often encounter (Maskit, 2011). Finally, in the stage of *career stability* teacher also show moderate attitude, but this time, we think, it happens for other reasons – at this stage teachers' engagement declines, they have reached the career plateau and attribute less value to professional development. Therefore, they also attribute less time to innovations and changes in practice.

### Qualitative researches

#### *Third research: Narratives of variation in teacher – pupil relationship across a career (Kington, 2012)*

*Theoretical background* – Research relies on results of Day, Sammons, Stobart, Kington and Gu (2007) study that recognizes 6 phases of teachers' professional life, where each phase has at least two possible outcomes (more or less favorable).

*Operationalization of career cycle* – teachers with different length of service were grouped into three categories, using the criteria given by Day and associates – six defined phases were conflated into three broad phases: 0 to 7 years of service (early career), 8 to 23 (mid career) and more than 23 years of service (late career).

*Goal* – To explore the perception of teacher – students relationship, from the perspective of early, mid and late career teachers, and define any similarities and differences between them.

### Methodological approach

The present study is primary a qualitative one, applying an interpretative paradigm through analysis of teachers' narratives. (Also, some quantitative analysis was performed in order to calculate frequencies of different key events related to changes in the relationship between teachers and students). Having in mind the goal of the study (exploration of perceptions of teachers) and the lack of previous data on this topic, it is clear that the chosen methodological approach is the most appropriate one. For the data collection critical event narrative approach was used, that consisted of *narrative approach interviews* and *critical event line*. After making the interpretations, the author has returned them to the respondents for validation. *Narrative approach interviews* provide rich and fruitful data, and they might be specially useful to study a developmental phenomenon, like career cycle, because they take into account the previous and the

present experiences, providing the possibility for the comparison of these experiences (Kington, 2012). (In this way we can have some advantages usually offered by longitudinal studies). Also, it was found useful to focus the topics of the interviews on the critical events. "In this sense, each interview was tailored to the situations, contexts and concerns of individual teacher-participants..." (Kington, 2012:192). Hence, the participants themselves could structure the topics of the conversation and give their perceptions of relationship with students, selecting events they considered important. And the researcher could obtain an insight into the key turning points of teachers' careers, and all their variety (Kington, 2012). The appreciation of key events (influence of important others, economical changes in the society or in the family, childbirth, sickness or death in the family etc.) when studying the career cycle takes us one step further, because we can with more certainty claim that there are mutual characteristics of groups of teachers in one stage of development, if we have insight into the key events in personal and professional lives of these people, causing variance in their professional behavior.

Sample consists of 30 teachers – 10 for each career phase, which is a proper size to provide plenty of information, and enough data per each group. Teachers come from 10 primary schools, different types of settlements (rural, suburban and inner city) and different levels of socio-economical status. We consider the decision to choose teachers from different schools a proper one – because by choosing for example all the teachers of one school it would be more difficult to generalize the findings, because there is no control of the effects the school environment itself would have on teachers' perceptions. It is also obvious that the author has considered the urbanization level and the socio-economical status of pupils as variables of importance for the phenomenon she studies, and tried to control for them by selecting schools from different types of settlements and with different SES background. This is exactly where we meet the restrictions of research on small samples – it is very hard to add mediating or moderating variables and see if they contribute to the explanation of the perceived effects. In this particular case, if the variables settlement type or socio-economical background do play a role, then the number of cases studied is not large enough to see in which way they do, in other words, the data cannot account for the influence of each variable or their interaction.

### Findings about teachers' career cycle

We can summarize the findings in the following way: there are certain similarities of perceptions of three groups of teachers, related to their interactions with children (ability to obtain and sustain fair relationships with students in seen as crucial by all groups; all groups are concerned with the quality of relationships, about understanding pupils they work with and being accepted by them etc.). On the other hand, there are differences in perceptions of relations with pupils between early career, mid career and late career teachers. When de-

fining quality of relationship with children, early career teachers focus on humor and familiarity, mid career teachers focus on academic-related interaction, while the third age category combines both approaches. Difference in practice is observed, among other things, in terms of proximity – early and mid career teachers use proximity to develop familiarity and define boundaries, while in late career the use of proximity declines. Also, early career teachers have less self confidence concerning maintaining discipline, mid career teachers are trying to balance friendly attitude with authority, “while among late career teachers control seems to be taken for granted.” (Kington, 2012: 196).

*Fourth research: Resisting plateauing:  
four veteran teacher' stories (Meister and Ahrens, 2011)*

*Theoretical background* – Milstein's research of career plateau, which he defines as state of loosing illusions, feeling of frustration and stagnation. Description of resilient teachers relies on characteristics of Fessler's *enthusiastic and growing* stage.

*Operationalization of career cycle* – research refers to characteristics of one stage – enthusiastic and growing described by Burke and associates (1984) and Fessler and Christensen (1992), according to Meister and Ahrens (2011). Being in this stage is measured through teachers' perceptions of the stage that describes them best at this point of their professional life.

*Goal* – To explore into the characteristics of teachers who have succeeded to resist plateauing in late career, and maintained enthusiasm and idealism

Methodological approach

*Phenomenological approach* – the researchers are interested to find out how the respondents place together their experiences, in order to find the meaning in them, and to describe participants' lived experiences. They try to understand the meaning that events and interactions have for the participants. The interviews were focused in the first step to teachers' reflections about their careers, their career path and specific, important events. In second interview, the details that emerged in the first one were discussed, and in final meeting the participants were asked to reflect about the meaning of the selected events. The researchers chose to meet the participants several times, in order to have the opportunity to analyze the data meanwhile, and discuss the findings again with the teachers so that the interpretations would get more accurate. Also, we suppose that teachers themselves need time to reflect upon the important experiences in their career, and new, deeper meanings might appear if the interviews get repeated. On the other hand, it helps developing closeness and trust between the participants and the interviewer, which might also contribute to the quality of the study. After the

stories were captured and described by the researchers, they were checked by the respondents, to be verified.

Sample of the study was a purposive one, consisting of four veteran teachers, which is appropriate, since the research does not intend to offer statistically generalizable data. It was also necessary to use a purposive sample, because the researchers were searching for respondents with particular characteristics that can be considered more to be layouts than bearers of majority's behaviors. Therefore, several techniques were used in order to form the sample – intensity sampling (Patton, 1990, according to Meister and Ahrens, 2011), criterion-based sampling (Patton, 1990, according to Meister and Ahrens, 2011) and reputation-al-case selection (LeCompte, Preissle & Tesch, 1993 according to Meister and Ahrens, 2011) The researchers were in search of respondents who strongly but not extremely manifest the phenomenon (enthusiastic behavior) – for those who can give rich information (Patton, 1990, according to Meister and Ahrens, 2011). So, it was necessary to consult people from teachers' work surrounding who can recommend the potential respondents, according to certain criteria (like innovative practice, recognition for their work, showing positive attitude towards job and professional development). We can see that in establishing criteria for selection of participants the authors rely on description of enthusiastic and growing teacher, but search for them in the group of veteran teachers, where they are not met so often.

In this place we could make the comparison with previous research, aiming to describe experiences of teachers in different phases of career (Kington, 2012). When choosing the sample size in the previous study (Kington, 2012) researcher decided to take larger sample in order to have the possibility of comparing perceptions of three groups of teachers, and to allow them to make inferences about differences between career stages. Therefore, it was rather difficult to repeat interviews, and make the insights even deeper and broader. In this case, only four respondents could give rich information, and their number allows the interview to go in-depth and discover reasons for their enthusiasm and resilience. It was also crucial whom the researcher will interview, not how many of respondents will participate.

### Findings about teachers' career cycle

This is a research that tends not to confirm the hypothesis derived from theory, but to describe the characteristics of people who represent positive exceptions from the majority. The authors state that common characteristics can be recognized among the respondents.

All four teachers see themselves as being in enthusiastic and growing stage. And there are several factors that facilitate this job attitude and behavior: these teachers were supported by leaders (professors in the faculty, school managers) and given recognition, autonomy and freedom, which has helped greatly main-



taining enthusiasm. Another characteristic of school environment recognized as helpful is existence of clear and firm cultural norms in the school. Further on, all teachers have strong feeling of self-efficacy, they get inspired by development and success of their students; they feel that they can make impact on the children they work with. Also, all four veteran teachers build external support systems, bond with colleagues and exchange with them ideas and experiences which strongly support their growth. Another source of support comes from teachers' families, and they state their partners and parents to be important resource in periods of frustration (we notice that often these important others come belong to teaching profession, as well). Finally, some teachers get strengthened from their religious beliefs, which helps finding meaning and sense and they all participate in leisure, relaxing activities and hobbies.

Still, in case when we have small number of respondents, no control of any mediating (intervening) or moderating variables can be achieved. For example, it would be valuable to have the comparison of stories of veteran teachers who also have affirmative social surrounding conditions but do not achieve high enthusiasm and certainly do not maintain of it in late career years.

## Discussion and conclusion

It is obvious that the list of researches chosen for this paper is short, and it is difficult to make generalizations out of them. It was not our goal though. We can see this analysis more as study of four cases that offer a good deal of methodological variety. It was not our intention to present all the ways that career cycle was studied lately, because it would overcome the volume of one paper. It would possibly even not be so fruitful, because the advantages and the disadvantages of certain methodological approach can be seen from one work that applies the approach properly.

From this short list of researches we can see that different methodological approaches and paradigms are employed in studying teachers' career cycle. Depending on the scope – search for regularities that are to be generalized and identification of relevant predictors and correlates of career cycle characteristics, or explanation of perceptions and insight into the meanings that teachers in different career have – the paradigms vary and give different contributions. We can see on the way from the first, purely quantitative research into the behavior considering professional development (Richter et al, 2011), to the second research (Maskit, 2011) that uses reflections of respondents referring to certain experiences – a change. Namely, in the first work numerous variables are introduced (formal and informal professional development, content of it, demographic variables, work engagement, additional responsibilities). This makes the inferences strong and reliable. Still, when offering only data about connections between

variables, we easily lose from our sight – the man and the context. On the other hand, the second research, relying on positivist paradigm, gives also information about the relationship between career cycle and important attitudes of teachers – concerning introduction of novelty and change, and at the same time offers descriptions of concrete “lived experiences”. We can understand that it was almost impossible to describe also the context of these experiences and events, and the information we could get about differences between schools of different level and schools from different socio-cultural background was out of reach of this study. The third, qualitative study (Kington, 2012) does exactly this – goes into the differences between certain groups of teachers. It introduces rich information on teachers’ lives and offers analysis of similarities and differences between the three age groups. We can understand the flow of change in their perceptions and work attitudes. But again, these stories originate from different contextual frameworks, and numerous variables could have influenced them. This is where we meet the limitations of qualitative research that does not have the power to study the influence and interaction of possibly relevant variables. The same applies to the last study (Meister and Ahrens, 2011), the one that carefully comes to in-depth conclusions, by interpreting and correcting interpretations several times. We get acquainted with factors that contribute to maintaining the feeling of enthusiasm and high commitment in late career. And yet, there is no comparison to other groups – for example, we do not discover why the other teachers, with similar circumstances, do not present same job attitude (and we presume that there are cases). The questions opened here certainly offer directions for future researches, and imply that quantitative researches open space for qualitative ones, that introduce stories and help us understand individual experiences; and qualitative researches trace a path for quantitative researches, to give stronger support for its findings and account for different influences.

From the presentation of research findings we can recognize the importance of career cycle models for teacher professional development. If we have in mind the characteristics of the career stages, we can understand better the uptake of learning opportunities, the attitude towards pedagogical changes and the priorities that teachers have. On the other hand, these results have also presented to us how important the school environment is, and in which way it can facilitate maintaining an enthusiastic attitude towards work and professional development.

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