Internationally, there are increasing numbers of teachers entering the profession from other careers. Career change entrants to teaching bring a wide range of professional, personal and work experiences and skills that are of great value to schools compared with those who select teaching as their first profession. Problem solving abilities, communication skills, multitasking capabilities, highly developed work ethic, analytic thinking and expert knowledge along with high levels of motivation and a thirst for ongoing professional learning have been identified as attributes of career change teachers. To capitalise on the capacities and capabilities that this group brings to the profession, and to better inform policymakers and school leaders about the impact of career change teachers on teaching and learning in schools, it is crucial to understand more about this growing demographic.

Many career change teachers enter teaching through pathways that are alternate to the traditional four year undergraduate degree programs that are the norm in countries like the UK, USA, New Zealand and Australia. The alternate program that provides the context for this paper is a one year graduate entry teacher education program, the Graduate Diploma in Education, situated within a large urban university in eastern Australia. This program is designed for people who already hold an undergraduate degree outside the field of education who wish to gain a qualification to teach in schooling contexts.

This paper reports on qualitative data drawn from a larger mixed methods study that explored the prior experiences and preparedness for classroom practice of a group of career change teacher education students. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 Graduate Diploma in Education students with interview questions focusing on revealing the motivations and prior experiences that led the group to consider teaching as a career. The findings revealed a wide diversity of first degrees with prior career experiences extending far beyond the focus of initial qualifications. It was perceived also that the alternative rewards of teaching attracted most of this group to the profession. Given the knowledge, skill and expertise that this group brings to the profession, the structure and delivery of graduate entry teacher education programs need to be recrafted in order to build on these competencies and capacities and integrate them into teaching.