

Status of the teaching profession – attracting and retaining teachers

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In light of the Parliament of Australia’s present inquiry into the status of the teaching profession, it is timely to consider what motivates and discourages teachers to enter and remain in the profession in current times. While there is nothing new in the federal government instigating inquiries into teaching and teacher education, the need to attract teachers and stem attrition, including from the pre-service stage, is no doubt a key motive force for this current review. The rate at which teachers are leaving the profession continues to increase and the figures are, by many measures, alarming. Christina Gray, Peter Wright and Robin Pascoe underscore this predicament in this current issue, citing teacher attrition during the first five years of teaching as close to 50%. Therefore, it is not surprising that the federal government is seeking to take action, the more so given escalating teacher shortages, including in core subject areas, with many schools forced to rely on teachers teaching out of field (Hobbs, 2013).

The terms of reference (TOR) for the current parliamentary inquiry¹ are illustrative in demonstrating key priorities for the government in improving outcomes in a range of areas for the profession. The inquiry has been largely welcomed by the profession, with the Australian Council of Deans stating that it might help to mitigate the negative political rhetoric about the profession (<https://www.acde.edu.au/acde-welcomes-house-of-reps-inquiry-into-the-status-of-teaching-profession/>). Of particular interest is how the priorities have changed over time, signifying a major shift in what is now considered crucial in improving the status of the profession. In a sense, the scope has moved from the outside in. Previously, the focus has been on large agendas, such as teacher supply and demand, community attitudes towards teachers and teaching, and the quality of pre-service and beginning teachers. Now, we see a focus on teachers’ work lives and the provision of support to attract and retain teachers. By way of illustration, we juxtapose the TOR of the current inquiry with those of the Commonwealth Government’s 1998 *A Class Act: Inquiry into the Status of the Teaching Profession* (https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Education_Employment_and_Workplace_Relations/Completed_inquiries/1996-99/teachers/report/index).

Table 1: Terms of reference of parliamentary reviews

Status of the Teaching Profession (current)	<i>A Class Act: Inquiry into the Status of the Teaching Profession (1998)</i>
1. Increasing the attractiveness of the profession for teachers and principals, including workplace conditions, and career and leadership structures	1. Describe community attitudes towards teachers and the ways in which schools operate
2. Provision of appropriate support platforms for teachers, including human and IT resources	2. Examine the expectations of teachers regarding their careers and identify those issues which bear most significantly upon job satisfaction,

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https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Employment_Education_and_Training/TeachingProfession/Terms_of_Reference

	stress and their ability to carry out their work efficiently and effectively
3. Identifying ways in which the burden of out-of-hours, at-home work can be reduced	3. Develop a national profile of Australia's teachers according to age, gender, qualifications, experience, salary levels and career history
4. Investigating ways to increase retention rates for the teaching profession, and avoid 'burn out' among early-career teachers.	4. Assess the levels of supply and demand which should guide the workforce planning for teachers in the context of demographic and other changes affecting schools into the next century
	5. Examine the tertiary entrance levels of teacher trainees and the research literature on the quality of Australian teacher education programs, and identify those features which bear significantly upon the quality of classroom practice
	6. Describe best practice in the induction of newly-trained teachers into schools, and identify any significant shortcomings in induction or on-going professional development which require urgent attention

It is heartening that the government is now taking heed of enduring calls, within the educational field and beyond, to focus on the factors and support measures that enable teachers to most effectively engage in their work throughout the stages of their careers. The literature is substantive in this regard, and the papers in this current issue contribute in different and significant ways to this literature.

In the first paper, Peter McIlveen leads a team of Australian and US researchers in reporting on research into the extreme importance of teacher professional learning to the sustainability of the profession. Authors McIlveen, Perera, Baguley, van Rensburg, Ganguly, Jasman and Veskova argue that professional learning is influenced by a number of work-life factors and the strain that often arises through trying to balance the two, thus correlating closely with the TOR of the current parliamentary inquiry. The team addresses this challenge through the notion of resilience, operationalised as career adaptability. Drawing from a sample of 193 teachers, structural equation modelling was used to show that career adaptability, as positive psychological capital and a dimension of resilience, positively influences engagement in professional learning, notwithstanding the negative impact of family-to-work strain. This paper contributes to the growing literature around the importance of resilience as a psychological construct in professional learning and the retention of teachers (see, e.g., Herbert, Allen, & McDonald, 2018).

On a similar topic, Clarence Ng underscores the importance of continuous professional learning as a feature of educational reform. Using a mixed-methods approach, Ng drew from a sample of 120 Hong Kong primary teachers to investigate teachers' professional selves and, specifically, the relationship between professional selves and professional learning. This work builds on previous research into teacher motivation for

professional learning, which has focused on psychological constructs, such as self-efficacy, autonomy, and willingness to learn. The author concludes that the content of professional selves mediates teachers' learning motives and behaviours and, as such, teachers who hold strong professional selves are more likely than those with weak professional selves to maximise the benefits derived from professional learning. Larsen and Allen (2016) used attribution theory to arrive at similar conclusions in their research into beginning teachers' motivation for professional learning.

The paper by New Zealand researchers Jenny Lee-Morgan, Matthew Courtney and Maureen Muller is contextualised in Indigenous language education and explores pre-service teachers' academic confidence and preparedness in English and Māori. The authors propose changes to the professional learning delivered through Māori-medium teacher education programs, arguing that curriculum developers need to place more emphasis on the development of Māori academic speaking and reading. The paper draws from a two-year research project that investigated learning and teaching experiences of Māori-medium pre-service teachers and staff in one of the nine Māori-medium teacher education providers in the country. The findings of this work are significant in pointing to the types of learning and teaching strategies that are most likely to optimise academic achievement by Māori-medium pre-service teachers.

Also in the field of Indigeneity, Australians Kathryn Paige, Lisa O'Keefe and Samuel Osborne explore pre-service teachers' confidence and knowledge of culturally responsive pedagogy in mathematics and science. This is an important topic. The Australian Curriculum now emphasises the need for all educators to value the cultures and perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (ATSI) and the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST) includes two standards aimed at raising teachers' awareness of ATSI cultures and histories and improving pedagogies that support ATSI student learning. In their paper, Paige and colleagues respond to the requirements of the Australian Curriculum and APST through reporting on a case study of a cohort of 26 Bachelor of Education pre-service teachers in a mathematics and science pedagogy final-year course. Findings suggest that pre-service teachers understand the importance of a well-prepared and considered approach to teaching ATSI students and ATSI content, and are committed to adopting such an approach.

Yeji Kim and Minsik Choi also embed their paper in cultural responsiveness, in this case through exploring pre-service teachers' cross-cultural experiences during an international teaching practicum. Through a qualitative case study, these US-based researchers examined the perceptions and experiences of 15 Korean social studies pre-service teachers participating in an international teaching practicum in the US. Given the emphasis that higher education programs now place on the internationalisation of curricula (see, e.g. Allen & Mohanna, 2013; Byram, 2018), this is an important field of research. Through undertaking a practicum in a foreign country, participants were expected to: increase cross-cultural understanding and global awareness; improve learning and teaching knowledge and skills in multi-cultural settings; and develop comparative knowledge of education systems in other countries. Findings support those of previous studies in underlining the positive influences of international practicums on the academic development of pre-service teachers from Asian countries.

The concluding paper by Gray, Wright and Pascoe also deals with the practicum. The authors explore the impact of mentoring on pre-service drama teachers' developing pedagogy, arguing that highly effective mentoring is essential in developing confidence and competence in beginning teachers who are then more likely to stay in the profession. There is a substantial evidence base on mentoring during the practicum (e.g., Allen, White, & Sim, 2017; Ambrosetti, Dekkers, & Knight, 2017), but much less that focuses on pre-service drama teachers. This paper makes a welcome contribution to the latter. Using a range of

qualitative methods, including field notes and semi-structured interviews, and drawing from a sample of five pre-service drama teachers undertaking an 11-week practicum, Gray and colleagues sought to explore the meaning participants made of their experiences and the contexts in which they took place. Findings are discussed under three themes: mentor as role model, mentor as nurturer, and mentor as confidante. Key among the conclusions is that pre-service drama teachers work best when a sense of belonging is experienced during the practicum, with mentors playing an integral role in the process.

A common thread through the six papers in this issue is the importance of effective professional learning throughout the career stages of teaching. For this to occur, professional learning must be valued as an indispensable dimension of teachers' work lives. As reported by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), conflicts with work schedules is one of the most commonly cited reasons why teachers across a broad range of countries and economies fail to participate in professional development activities (OECD, 2014). Space and time need to be provided to ensure that professional learning is not conceived as an additional or optional extra to the everyday work of teachers. Thus, we applaud the TOR of the current parliamentary inquiry in foregrounding teachers' work-life balance as a means of improving the status of the profession and helping to curb the unacceptable attrition rates of teachers in this country.

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