

# Research shows how 'job crafting' can help teachers manage and enjoy their stressful work

March 9 2023, by Gavin R. Slemm, Dianne Vella-Brodrick and Jacqui Francis

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

About three quarters of Australian teachers [experience substantial stress](#) in a typical work week, according to a 2021 survey. Another 2019 Australian study showed more than half suffer from anxiety, and about

one in five meet the criteria for moderate to severe depression.

It's not surprising, then, that increasing numbers of [teachers](#) are leaving the profession. Meanwhile, enrolments for education degrees [have been declining](#).

Teachers in Australia and around the world are under-resourced and burning out, reinforcing the urgent need for policy initiatives to improve their working conditions. But can anything else be done?

Our research shows one way teachers may be able to take more control over their well-being at work is by "job crafting".

## What is job crafting?

Job crafting is about making noticeable changes to your job to make it [more engaging and meaningful](#). These are changes you make yourself of your own initiative and they can be small or large. The idea is employees "craft" their jobs so it more closely aligns with what they value and how they perceive themselves.

Job crafting [emerged](#) in management research in 2001, and has since been studied in a range of occupations. There are at least three different ways employees can craft their work:

- Task crafting is about changing the number, scope, sequence, or types of tasks in a job
- Relational crafting is about making changes to how you relate to people at work
- Cognitive crafting refers to changing how you interpret or think about your work.

Studies show job crafting is [associated with](#) employee well-being, engagement and performance. Studies [also show](#) when employees are trained to use job crafting strategies, they show increased performance and work engagement.

## **Our research**

In 2022, we conducted 46 in-depth interviews with teachers across all levels in Australia about how they used job crafting. Teachers told us they used job crafting in multiple ways, including by modifying the tasks they did with students and by involving other teachers in their classes.

One primary school teacher spoke about how he combined his [hobby](#) of playing cards with his maths lessons.

"I bring a lot of those card games into class with the kids and we find the maths in the games [...] I think they can definitely sense my passion for the games and that makes them more excited. I've had quite a few parents say, 'My child now loves maths because of the way you play the games,' which is really nice."

Another primary school teacher spoke of how they emphasized their love of reading in their teaching—and sought out new ways to read with their students through collaborating with other teachers.

"Just because I love reading books, after lunch we might read a book, or go to another [teacher's] class and read a book with their kids, and [that teacher] will come to mine. It means I get to meet new kids and they've got someone different in front of them, and my kids also have someone different in front of them."

A secondary teacher gave us another example of how they work with

colleagues during the day, to change classroom dynamics:

"I love saying to the other teachers, 'Hey, do you want to drop into my class because I think you'll like it' or 'This kid misses you, he hasn't seen you in ages, do you want to come swing by?' It's so nice to have other adults in the room [...] And [for] teachers that you have really good relationships with, you can then model what a healthy relationship looks like to the kids."

## **'Helping human beings'**

Other teachers spoke of how they used cognitive crafting by expanding their ideas of what they consider to be the role of a teacher. As one primary teacher noted:

"I see myself as helping human beings grow rather than teaching academic knowledge."

A secondary teacher also talked of the importance of thinking beyond the daily "grind" of their job:

"I think teachers can, especially when they've been teaching for a while, kind of get into a bit of a grind. And it's just they see teaching as delivering content. But I don't see it that way. To me, teaching is all about building relationships with my students and using the content as a vehicle to build those relationships and to hopefully get them to where they need to be in later life."

Cognitive strategies such as this are key to connecting the job to a larger purpose. This gives work more meaning, which is [essential](#) for employee well-being.

## What helps job crafting?

Our interviewees also spoke of the things that helped and hindered their job crafting.

They told us having too many time pressures and administrative burdens made it difficult to try new approaches. They also said a lack of time, rigid systems, and a lack of autonomy within their schools made it difficult to be creative. One secondary teacher noted:

"If you've been teaching for a while, or even if you're a grad teacher, you spend a lot of time, you know, just surviving. Then to have the energy to think about changing things, even if it is for the better, it's difficult."

Teachers said they needed time to reflect on their work. They also said they needed school leaders to support their ideas, so they felt safe and free to take risks, which [research](#) shows is important for job crafting.

One primary teacher noted how many teachers are fearful of being judged at work.

"We preach mistakes being okay and risk-taking with our kids, but we don't really with our staff. We like our staff to be neat and ordered and to tick the right boxes [...]. So I think that whole idea of taking risks and challenging educational philosophies would allow people to be more curious in that space. "

## Job crafting works, but we need to do more

Our research shows teachers are using job crafting to make their jobs more manageable, more enjoyable and more effective.

They also told us the overall school environment can either support these different approaches—or make it too difficult to try.

While job crafting has significant potential to help teachers in [stressful jobs](#), it is important to note that improving teacher well-being is a shared responsibility. And it is up to schools, government and the broader community to better support the important work teachers do.

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