

It's a numbers game: Embedding early career teachers

July 24 2023, by Samantha Dunn



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

As New South Wales works hard to attract new teachers, and to keep them in the profession. Research by UNSW Sydney's Rebecca Collie into teacher well-being offers some solutions.

The NSW Premier Chris Minns nominated attracting teachers to the public school system as one of his goals after 100 days in office. And the NSW Department of Education is in the midst of drive to offer thousands of teachers permanent positions. These efforts are in light of high numbers of teachers planning to leave the profession over the next five years, and statistics quoted by the [federal government](#) that 20% of graduates leave teaching within three years.

Scientia Associate Professor of Education Psychology in the UNSW School of Education, Rebecca Collie, studies teacher well-being and has identified some keys to retaining teachers, and especially those in the early years of their careers.

Making a strong start in teaching

"I think part of the reason teachers leave soon after starting in the profession is because of the reality shock," Assistant Prof. Collie says.

"Teaching is complex work. Not only do teachers teach, assess and plan all the aspects of the students' learning, they are also required to do many tasks beyond that, whether that's a compliance requirement, classroom management to create a supportive classroom, then doing extra things like running an environment club, coaching a sporting team, doing yard duty.

"So when teachers enter the profession, they are learning 100 different things at the same time and that can be quite a shock."

Collie's research has identified several reasons that teachers leave the profession. A high workload base is one barrier to staying, and another is a lack of appropriate professional learning to effectively manage the classroom. The research has been published in *Contemporary Educational Psychology*.

"When teachers don't feel confident to manage the classroom effectively, for example dealing with disruptive student behavior, it can be extremely stressful."

Both workload and student behavior management issues are currently the focus of policymakers. The federal government's working group of Education Ministers across Australia developed the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan which acknowledged the intensification of work for teachers across Australia and will report on solutions later in 2023.

A 2022 Senate inquiry was established to look into the increasing disruption in Australian classrooms, pointing to the fact that Australia has among the world's most disorderly classrooms, ranking 69 out of 76 jurisdictions worldwide, according to PISA.

The solutions to teacher attrition, or burnout, or ways to increase teacher well-being include strategies that schools can implement and those that individual teachers can activate.

School-led well-being solutions

"One thing that many schools already do is to offer early career teachers reduced workloads in their first year of teaching. Alongside this, streamlining administrative work, reducing face-to-face teaching and providing more time for collaboration and planning" would all help early career teachers transition into the school system in a supported manner.

Australia has one of the highest hours of face-to-face teaching across the globe. [A 2018 TALIS survey](#) showed Australian teachers worked an average 44.8 hours a week, well over the OECD average of 38.8 in the week preceding the survey date. So that means there's less time for planning and less time for collaboration. Reduced face-to-face teaching time is one way to help reduce the workload stress of teachers.

"Secondly," says Collie, "access to evidence-based professional learning is important. And it's especially important that teachers have a say in what would be most useful to them in terms of the skill they want to develop. So, for example, it might be that building skills in classroom management is particularly important to an early career teacher.

"Mentoring and coaching programs are also important. Schools have different approaches to this, but matching early career teachers with mentors helps with retention.

"Coaching in the form of peer observation is particularly helpful as it allows early career teachers to develop their skills and build confidence in their practice. A sense of confidence has a lot to do with whether teachers remain in the profession or not."

Helena Granziera, Lecturer in Educational Psychology at UNSW's School of Education and Director of the Master of Teaching Program (primary), agrees that mentoring and peer support is key to retention.

"Our research shows that if teachers have social support from colleagues and feel as though they're able to collaborate effectively with colleagues and leaders, there is a protective or buffering factor that will reduce the impact of things like managing difficult behavior in the classroom."

And, says Dr. Granziera, classroom management is a particular challenge when teachers first start working. "Disciplinary problems can be soul destroying for teachers because many [new teachers](#) come into the profession idealistic and hoping to be able to make a difference. But then they end up spending so much of their time trying to manage behavior that less time is available to do what they love to do, which is to teach."

In an effort to increase students' ability to understand more about classroom management before they arrive in the classroom, UNSW's

School of Education introduced SimLab, a [classroom management](#) simulator, to both its master's and undergraduate education programs this year.

SimLab allows teachers to attend a Zoom meeting in which five student avatars are run by a professional actor who adjusts the behavior of the five children in real-time according to the teacher's input and behavior management skills as they teach the lesson.

Finally, says Collie, "it's important for schools to make sure early career teacher's voices are heard. Get their opinions, listen to what will help them, allow them to have input into decisions, so that they feel that they really belong as part of the staff."

Teacher-led well-being solutions

Making time to develop [positive relationships](#) in the school community is another key to [teacher](#) well-being. "One thing we find again and again in our studies," says Collie, "is the importance of relatedness. Once you have a sense of belonging, of positive relationships with people within the school community, of a growing rapport with your students, a lot of other things come into line. So, for example, if teachers have good relationships with their students, it's easier to engage them, and then students are less likely to be disruptive in class."

"Early career teachers should be encouraged to engage with social emotional learning programs they can implement in the [classroom](#) to help build positive relationships. They should also take the opportunities for professional learning that help them get connected. So learning about effective ways to engage their students, and also building relationships with colleagues, formal mentors, and also informal mentors are all important."

Keeping in touch with university connections is also useful. "Staying in touch with their cohort is a really helpful way to share ideas, discuss challenges and operate as informal mentors for one another," says A/Prof. Collie.

Building rapport with both students and colleagues takes time.

"However," she says, "it's a worthwhile endeavor, because we do see just how important relationships are for well-being, for commitment, and for retention."

More information: Helena Granziera et al, Teacher well-being: A complementary variable- and person-centered approach harnessing Job Demands-Resources theory, *Contemporary Educational Psychology* (2022). [DOI: 10.1016/j.cedpsych.2022.102121](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2022.102121)

Building Better Schools with Evidence-based Policy.

[www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters ... being-rebecca-collie](http://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/.../being-rebecca-collie)

Provided by University of New South Wales

Citation: It's a numbers game: Embedding early career teachers (2023, July 24) retrieved 23 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-07-game-embedding-early-career-teachers.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.