

How do we retain teachers? Supporting them to work together could help

November 7 2023, by Andrew Kingsford-Smith, Hoa Nguyen, Rebecca J Collie and Tony Loughland



Credit: [Anastasia Shuraeva/ Pexels](#), [CC BY-SA](#)

Australia is in the grips of a teacher shortage "crisis" [according to](#) Education Minister Jason Clare.

Federal education department [modeling](#) shows there will be a high school teacher shortfall of about 4,000 by 2025. Media [reports suggest](#) shortages are already particularly bad in [rural areas](#).

Clare [says](#) one of the ways we will fix the shortage is by "increasing the number of people who stay on teaching."

Our [new study](#) shows increasing opportunities for [teachers](#) to work together may keep teachers in their jobs.

Our research illustrates [collaboration](#) between teachers is linked to greater [job satisfaction](#), as well as other benefits for teachers working in rural schools.

What does collaboration involve for teachers?

Collaboration for teachers can include sharing teaching resources, discussing approaches to different classes and students and collaborating on common standards for student assessments.

But teachers often work in relative isolation of each other, as they are confined to their classrooms and assigned class groups.

According to a [2018 OECD](#) report, 28% of teachers around the world teach with another teacher in the same classroom at least once a month and 47% exchange teaching materials with others at least once a month.

Our research

[Our research](#) investigated what work factors are most relevant to teachers' well-being. We also looked at whether there was a difference between teachers working in rural or metropolitan areas.

We examined two teacher well-being outcomes: job satisfaction and work strain. Job satisfaction represents whether teachers are happy working at their current school. Work strain measures whether teachers

believe their job negatively impacts their mental and physical health.

Our study used the OECD's [Teaching and Learning International Survey](#). This is the largest international survey about teachers and their working conditions. We used the most recently available data from 2018. Our sample included 3,376 [high school teachers](#) working in 219 schools across Australia.

Collaboration is linked to job satisfaction

Our research showed teachers who reported more frequent collaboration with their colleagues also reported greater job satisfaction. This was true for teachers working in both rural and metropolitan schools.

This indicates working together with colleagues may help teachers to feel more satisfied with their job, no matter where they work. The results suggest the more teachers work together, the greater their job satisfaction.

Collaboration may help teachers feel connected with their colleagues and build positive relationships. It may also help teachers feel more competent and supported as part of a team.

Rural schools

Our research also found more frequent collaboration appeared to have other benefits to teachers in rural schools.

Rural teachers who had concerns about the relevance of the professional development their school provided were more likely to report their job negatively impacted their mental and [physical health](#) (in other words, they had higher work strain).

This is perhaps because teachers may find their work more difficult when they do not receive relevant professional development (new skills, approaches and ideas).

In rural schools, professional development can be harder to access because of distance and the availability of relieving teaching staff. With these existing barriers, it may be particularly detrimental to their well-being if professional development is then considered to be irrelevant.

Collaboration and professional development concerns

Interestingly, our analysis revealed the link between irrelevant professional development and work strain was not present for rural teachers who collaborated more frequently with their colleagues.

This suggests more frequent collaboration may protect against the effects of irrelevant professional development on work strain. It may be collaboration can provide teachers with [informal learning opportunities](#) that help them to do their jobs better and feel less stressed about work.

How can teachers collaborate more?

Our research suggests schools and [school systems](#) may want to encourage more collaboration, while also ensuring their staff are provided with relevant [professional development](#). This could help teachers stay in their jobs.

To support teacher collaboration, international [research](#) says teachers need to work together in ways they find effective. This highlights the importance of listening to staff to understand their needs.

International [research](#) also suggests collaboration is most beneficial when

teachers are given dedicated time at work to work together so it is built into their work hours, rather than an added extra.

How do we encourage collaboration?

Two evidence-based ways teachers can collaborate are [peer observations](#) and [mentoring](#).

These are both approaches that can happen without major disruption to classes.

Peer observations [involve](#) a group of teachers observing each other teaching and then meeting to discuss their thoughts. These peer observations are [designed to be supportive](#) and may help teachers gain a sense of professional community, boost morale and identify teaching practices that are particularly effective within their school's context.

For teacher mentoring, teachers can be assigned a more senior or experienced member of the school to meet with and discuss their work experiences. [Research](#) shows it is important for mentors and mentees to feel as though they are both benefiting from the process. A mentee may benefit, for example, by thinking about their professional approaches in new ways, while mentors can also learn from listening to their mentee's experiences.

In smaller and more remote schools, technology may be needed to help connect teachers with colleagues from other schools for both peer observations and mentoring.

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: How do we retain teachers? Supporting them to work together could help (2023, November 7) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-11-retain-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.