

Chapter 2

Policies and Practices

Abstract Policies and practices refer to the officially mandated statements, guidelines, values and prescriptions that both enable and constrain early career teacher wellbeing. Early career teacher resilience and wellbeing is enhanced when systems' policies and practices show a strong commitment to the principles and values of social justice, teacher agency and voice, community engagement, and respect for local knowledge and practice.

Keywords Pre-service teacher preparation • Transition • Employment processes

This theme examines how major policy issues are accommodated in schools and how their interpretation and selective enactment impacts both positively and negatively on the lives of graduate teachers. This theme is about the 'big picture' of schooling in Australia and how it affects the personal lives and professional careers of our newest teachers.

Mass education has been directed, managed and controlled through politically mandated policies and procedures for over a century (Cranston et al. 2010). These mandates relate to such things as the nature and extent of professional preparation teachers undertake, the age of compulsory schooling for children, student–teacher ratios in schools, and the scope and sequence of year-level-based curricula (AITSL 2011; Alexander 2009; ACARA 2010). Not surprisingly, these broad educational policies have a direct impact on early career teachers. For example, recruitment and deployment policies and processes determine where graduate teachers are employed (metropolitan, rural, remote and/or low SES schools), and under what terms and conditions they are employed (relief, short-term contract, long-term contract, permanent employment).

The graduate teachers we interviewed ranked uncertainties over continued employment opportunities as one the main stresses they face. They were clear that more respectful, transparent, fairer and responsive employment processes were needed to improve the way they were treated so early in their careers. Some teachers welcomed reforms in this area by applauding new policies and practices

that clearly support early career teachers through internships, induction programs and mentor schemes. Other positive policy interventions included employment incentive schemes, reduced teaching loads and targeted professional development activities for early career teachers. The teachers and school leaders we interviewed in this study were clear about the need for and value of such policies.

Broader political and economic agendas also impact on the professional lives of new teachers, albeit in ways that are often hidden or obscure at the local level. For example, national priorities to ensure Australia's international economic competitiveness have led to the proliferation of new performance and accountability measures within our education systems (Reid 2005). These have a direct and daily impact on the professional lives of early career teachers through the implementation of mass compulsory testing (NAPLAN), stringent reporting requirements and 'performance management' regimes.

Even policies and practices that are philosophically grounded have local effect. The inclusive education movement, for example, has encouraged the integration of students with diverse and challenging needs in classes that previously catered for a smaller range of student abilities and behaviours (Forlin and Chambers 2011). This commitment to inclusive education has intensified the behaviour management demands on teachers and has led to a rise in early career teachers' reports of difficulties. This was certainly revealed in the stories told to us by the graduate teachers we interviewed. However, as well as telling us of their problems, they also spoke positively of the support they received from other staff (School Services Officers, mainly) and from their school leaders. This support was instrumental in helping them to adjust to the demands of classroom life with diverse and challenging students.

In summary, this theme identifies the ways early career teachers are affected by longstanding and mostly 'taken-for-granted' educational policies and practices that define their pre-service preparation, their work and working conditions, and more recent policy initiatives that reflect the role of education in achieving new national goals. This theme briefly explores the context of schooling in Australia in the twenty-first century and how it affects early career teachers. It shows how the quite personal and local challenges faced by graduate teachers frequently have their genesis in broader political and social policies and practices. In making this link between the 'personal' and the 'political', this theme explores the possibilities for local action that builds on the strengths of new teachers and enhances their sense of agency and resilience. Overall the conditions identified for this theme are that to enhance early career teacher resilience it is important to:

- provide relevant, rigorous and responsive pre-service preparation for the profession
- create innovative partnerships and initiatives that assist smooth transitions to the workforce
- implement transparent, fair and responsive employment processes.

Provide Relevant, Rigorous and Responsive Pre-service Preparation for the Profession

This condition highlights the reciprocal responsibilities of universities, systems and schools in ensuring that pre-service preparation meets the dynamic needs of the profession. All these stakeholders have an essential role to play in the planning, implementation and review of on-campus programs and professional experience opportunities in schools. Collectively they should work to:

- foster stakeholders' collective ownership of preparation, induction and ongoing learning
- provide diverse, rigorous and carefully planned pre-service professional experiences
- ensure coherence between on-campus courses and the dynamic demands of the profession.

Partners for Learning

Schools and universities as partners? The idea made sense to Derek from early in his career, and 20 years later, he has continued to advocate for and work with pre-service teachers in university programs and graduates entering their first school.

As a young teacher, Derek became involved in a school-wide approach to first year teacher education in which several schools worked closely with a local university to offer help for groups of new teachers. In the 20 years since he first started supporting this partnership, Derek has maintained a high level involvement, most recently leading his school's participation in it in the role of principal.

In addition to this work, Derek has contributed to the on campus program at various year levels and encourages and supports his teachers to do the same, particularly those in the early years of their careers:

One great initiative we have is getting new teachers who have started teaching to come and speak with students at uni. I know most new teachers are really nervous about speaking to large groups, but they also enjoy the recognition and confidence boost too, Derek said.

Teachers don't often have the chance to talk about what they do, they just do it... Speaking to teaching students at uni has been really helpful in getting new teachers to talk about their methodology and what they do every day.

Through this partnering success, one of Derek's main goals is to introduce new teachers to the joys of teaching in complex, multi-cultural schools. Derek's school, of which he is now principal, regularly hosts new teachers for their final professional experience, making sure that when they graduate they get at least one paid day in the same classroom.

I think that everyone needs to have their first day in a positive environment. I've seen too many teachers destroyed by having that first day in tears, like they're not sure if they made the right decision. By hosting, we ensure they have a great first day experience, Derek says. "Schools and universities need to be community partners", he says. "You always have to continue that partnership because we offer different things but without each other you certainly won't become a wonderful teacher—you need both sides. We need to be partners for life".

Commentary

This story illustrates the central role that school partners can play in the development of pre-service programs, both through relevant and engaging contributions to on-campus components and structured and supportive school-wide approaches to professional experience. It presents a very different picture to the commonly reported situation in which school participants 'see their work in pre-service teacher education as a "favour" to the university' (Martinez and Coombs 2001, p. 286). Partnerships such as the one developed by Derek and his staff not only enhance the learning of pre-service teachers, but also provide benefits to school participants through the opportunities to share ideas and showcase and reflect on practice. Such collaborations do not just happen; they have been found to depend on a range of supportive conditions such as effective communication, flexible funding, local autonomy and continuity (Peters 2011) as well as 'trust' that mutual benefits will occur (Kruger et al. 2009, p. 97).

Possibilities for Promoting Resilience

Employers, Unions, Universities and Other Professional Groups

- Develop structures for ongoing communication, consultation and collaboration between universities, systems and schools.
- Provide practical support and professional development to enhance the involvement of school colleagues in teacher education programs and professional experience.
- Establish cross-site reference groups to regularly review teacher education programs.

School Leaders

- Work in partnership with teacher educators to develop structured programs that involve staff from across the school sharing expertise with pre-service teachers.
- Collect and provide data and feedback from teachers, students and/or parents/caregivers that illuminate priorities for pre-service preparation.
- Encourage and support teachers to take on mentoring roles with pre-service teachers and to participate in on-campus programs.

Colleagues

- Take on formal mentoring roles with pre-service teachers and find opportunities to share your expertise and contribute to their learning even if they are not placed in your classroom.
- Work with pre-service teachers to identify developmental goals and the ways you can support them to achieve them.
- Help pre-service teachers to make connections between their on-campus and in-school learning by talking to them about your rationale for decisions and actions.

Early Career Teachers

- Share experiences of early career challenges, successes and needs with other pre-service teachers, school colleagues, employers and teacher educators.
- When faced with discrepancies between on-campus preparation and the demands of early career teaching use an inquiry approach to find a productive way forward.
- Reflect on pre-service preparation to identify strengths and areas of need and provide feedback about these to school colleagues, employers and teacher educators.

Insights from Early Career Teachers

Importance of Professional Experience

The practicum prepared me more than anything else. (Simon)

Diverse School Experiences

I liked the contrast of the schools I had [for professional experience]. (Olivia)

Importance of Role Models

Everything that [the lecturer] had been showing us he'd been actually modelling and it was when all of these things did click—he was a really great role model. (Tracy)

Emphasising the Importance of Relationship Building

And they came in and we just did lots of get to know you stuff in the first week, which uni really prepared me for I think, lots of different games and activities and stuff. (Robyn)

Insights from School Leaders

Preparing for the Twenty-First Century

I think there's a lot of talk about 21st century learning in classrooms and how that should be, but I think that nothing has really changed to teach the [pre-service] teachers some alternative strategies. (Ryan)

Gaps in Knowledge

The ECTs all say, "So what do we teach?" They don't seem to get that from the university. (Cherie)

Being Innovative

What I wouldn't mind seeing a little bit more of, though, is them breaking the rules. I'd like to see teachers, the early year teachers, being fostered a bit more to come up with crazy, different ideas, you know innovative type stuff, rather than, "Okay I've got to do what the red tape tells me to do." (Derek)

Wisdom from the Literature

Conceptual Coherence in Teacher Education

The lack of articulation and the fragmented nature of most conventional pre-service programs underscore the need for conceptual coherence. (Feiman-Nemser 2001, p. 1023)

Forging Locally Appropriate Partnerships

If relationships and partnerships are to be forged in locally appropriate ways, universities and schools need to be proactively and creatively involved in their development. (Bloomfield 2009, p. 35)

Benefits of Mentoring Pre-service Teachers

At the one-to-one level, mentoring teachers share their knowledge developing respect for their years of experience; they evaluate their own practices through reflection about teaching with their mentee; they are exposed to varying perspectives developed by the pre-service teachers through their university study; they have an opportunity to see their classes and pupils through a different set of eyes. In addition, having another "teacher in the classroom" can be a welcome additional resource. (Walkington 2007, pp. 285–286)

Negotiating the School–University Divide

As a result of experiencing the “reality” of classrooms and schools on practicum pre-service teachers often find themselves questioning what they are learning in their university teacher education programs in light of what often seems to be a different philosophy and practice. (Sinclair et al. 2005, p. 211)

Dangers of Imitating Practice

By merely imitating practice rather than critically synthesising both theory and classroom teachers’ practices, pre-service teachers may fail to increase their own understanding of learning processes, develop their own vision of education or develop their own professional practice. (Sinclair et al. 2005, p. 212)

Practices That Constrain Resilience

Ignoring the Realities of the Classroom

I feel the uni courses said a lot about ... the kids need to be hands on, and while I do believe that there is no way that a teacher has the time to plan a full hands on lesson each day. (Sylvia, ECT)

Assuming Understanding

To be honest, a lot of university just went over my head. (Brad, ECT)

Inappropriate Appointments

I was technically only trained for Middle School and to be given Year 12 it was sort of a challenge. (Tracy, ECT)

Questions for Reflection and Conversations

- What are the principles that underpin relevant, rigorous and responsive pre-service preparation for the profession?
- What are the practical implications of these for university, system and school stakeholders?
- How might we address the impediments and opportunities inherent in collective ownership for preparation, induction and ongoing learning?

Create Innovative Partnerships and Initiatives That Assist Smooth Transitions to the Workforce

This condition acknowledges the diversity of teacher professional placements, the complexity of teachers' work in the range of different teaching contexts, and recognises that, in addition to their developing professional skills, early career teachers bring with them to the workforce a range of professional and life skills that have application to a variety of teaching positions. Stakeholders can:

- support professional development suitable to the school context
- acknowledge the value of previous professional experiences and expertise
- provide additional professional and financial resources for complex school settings.

More than Just a Grade

Astrid wanted more from her degree than just a grade. In her second year of studying teaching, she had a mentor who also worked at a language development centre.

Wanting to get involved, Astrid began to volunteer at the development centre, and ended up doing her third year prac there, as well as participating in the centre's professional development training.

My mentor was quite inspirational, I wanted to go along and see what she did at the language centre. I ended up getting lots of volunteer work there and I started to get a real interest for literacy development, Astrid said.

Astrid's mentor, part of the uni's partnering with local schools, helped Astrid connect with and feel passionate about kids and learning. Astrid was able to work in a relaxed environment with her mentor, who had real life teaching experience, and safely develop ways to engage and teach kids that suited her.

Not only did I learn so much from the process, and catch a lot of passion from my mentor, I was actually asked to come back and work once I had finished my degree. This recognition of my work, and the chance to keep working at literacy, which I feel so strongly about, was a dream come true, and not what I expected when I first met my mentor, Astrid said.

Commentary

Astrid's pre-service teacher education course had developed a model for their professional experience placements which was founded on active and innovative partnerships with participating schools. At the core of these partnerships was the commitment to enhanced learning for children. In partnership schools, teachers, pre-service teachers and university faculty staff are engaged in collaborative inquiry

to develop curriculum and investigate teaching practice with the goal of improving educational outcomes for children (Sharp and Turner 2008). Instead of the more traditional supervisory model, pre-service teachers work in collaboration with their mentor teachers, and schools are encouraged to value the extracurricular and life skills that pre-service teachers bring with them to their professional experience, and use them in ways that will enhance learning opportunities for children.

As a course with a large enrolment of students, there is a heavy reliance on casual (sessional) staff who fill tutoring positions. These tutors are largely drawn from the teaching staff in partnership schools and are encouraged to enrol in higher degree courses at the university, where their classroom inquiry can contribute to higher level qualifications. Astrid's literacy tutor had been one such teacher, enrolled in the final stages of a Masters degree and provided with release time from her school (a language development centre) so that she could tutor in literacy units in the undergraduate course.

As a result of the positive relationship she formed with her tutor, Astrid had completed a professional experience at the centre, had continued her association there as a volunteer, and had participated in staff professional development as a member of the school community. The relationships that had been established between Astrid's pre-service course and their partnership schools made it possible for Astrid to have an enriched professional experience as a pre-service teacher and to participate in professional learning alongside staff at the centre. These experiences and her confidence in the area of teaching literacy can only have made her more desirable as an employee. Louden et al. (2005) reported that when school–university partnerships of this kind are in place graduates are viewed very positively by school leaders and other teachers, considering them 'better prepared', 'better than other applicants' and 'completely up to speed' (p. 91).

Currently, there is a lack of parity in recruitment practices across the employing authorities. The Western Australian Auditor General has observed that, while 'Independent schools can and do head-hunt top trainee teachers at an early stage', graduating teachers who apply to teach in the public school system are 'given the lowest precedence in the appointment system' (2000, p. 27). This is because of the necessity to appoint permanent and fixed-term teachers before appointments can be offered to graduates.

Possibilities for Promoting Resilience

Employers, Unions, Universities and Other Professional Groups

Universities

- Work with practicum schools to develop reciprocal relationships and partnerships.

- Acknowledge the role that practising teachers can play in supporting pre-service and early career teachers, and work to support that role, e.g., provide professional development opportunities, invite teachers and school leaders to present guest lectures, employ teachers as tutors.
- Work with schools to enhance the learning experience for both children and pre-service teachers by developing projects where schools and pre-service teachers can work together, e.g., literacy and numeracy coaching, arts projects.
- Take into account pre-service teachers' particular skills and interests and attempt to match them with the needs of the schools where they complete their professional experiences.

Systems

- Provide school leaders with some degree of autonomy to allow them to offer employment to a graduating teacher who is already making a contribution to the school community.
- Make provision for classroom teachers and/or school leaders to have release time so that they can support university faculty by giving guest lectures or tutoring pre-service teachers.

School Leaders

- Actively seek to establish partnerships with universities and encourage teachers to mentor pre-service teachers and develop productive relationships with university faculty.
- Where possible, encourage and support mentor teachers to develop links and partnerships with pre-service teacher education courses, e.g., by allowing reduced teaching loads.

Colleagues

- Consider creative possibilities for pre-service teachers to support children's learning (e.g. Support-a-Reader; arts events) and approach university faculty to involve pre-service teachers.

Early Career Teachers

- Inform practicum departments, mentor teachers and school leaders of particular skills or interests that could be useful to the school (e.g., another language, music, art, drama) and support children's learning.
- Take up opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities offered by the school where an early career teacher's particular skills or interests may be a valuable asset.

Insights from Early Career Teachers

Because I was here last year, I'm kind of just in with it all. (Astrid)

I spent six solid weeks here last year... and it was with such amazing people that I instantly had support here and I instantly have a circle of colleagues around me. (Tracey)

Slotting in was easy enough because I'd done relief teaching and prac teaching at the school. (David)

Insights from School Leaders

The school gets a little snapshot of that person as a teacher before they have even employed them. (Bronwyn)

New graduates should be given a contract for two years, not one; if possible in the same school. I'd love to be able to see that happen, because they need consistency in those first two years. (Troy)

... many of the new graduates who do come out are their own worst enemies in that it appears that from their training they are given a set of views and values that they bring into school and those views and values don't necessarily reflect what we are able to do in a school. (Troy)

Wisdom from the Literature

Pre-service Teacher Education Is a Shared Responsibility

Key ingredients in these partnerships are the awareness that teacher education is a shared responsibility and a willingness to work in partnership with other parties to fulfil that responsibility. (Top of the Class Report on the Inquiry into Teacher Education 2007)

Key to the success [of the partnership model] has been the shared purpose, the interactive processes which have focused primarily on negotiated needs between partners, the core committed staff, the centrality of the practicum in the program and regular meaningful and personal support for schools. (Sharp and Turner 2008)

Practices That Constrain Resilience

Telling Teachers to Forget What They Have Been Taught in Their Pre-service Courses

Do you remember all the things you were taught... over the last 4 years? ... You can forget 80 % of them, because now you'll start really learning what it's about. (Troy, school leader)

Failing to Make the Connections

The ECTs all say “so what do we teach?” They don’t seem to get that from the university. (Cherie, school leader)

Even though they may have done a lot of things at uni, often initially they don’t make connections. (Annabel, school leader)

To be honest, a lot of university just went over my head. (Brad, ECT)

Questions for Reflection and Conversations

What possibilities exist for reciprocal relationships between schools and pre-service teacher education courses?

How could the life skills and developing pedagogical skills of pre-service teachers be used to enhance learning opportunities for children?

What possibilities exist for teachers and school leaders to contribute to the development of pre-service teacher education courses and the on-campus experience for students?

Implement Transparent, Fair and Responsive Employment Processes

This condition recognises the importance of employers’ recruitment, appointment and retention policies and practices in shaping the early teaching experiences of graduate teachers. While this research found many instances of damaging employment practices that undermined the wellbeing of teachers, it also revealed promising trends towards policy reform that may reduce the anxiety and uncertainty of embarking on a teaching career. Stakeholders responsible for teacher recruitment and development could well focus on:

- notifying school appointments in a timely manner
- providing opportunities for continuity of employment
- ensuring equitable access to support, resources and learning opportunities
- providing professional development that equips school leaders to support early career teachers.

At Last I Feel Like I Actually Have a Career!

To: Bruce Johnson

From: Tania

Subject: Research

Sent: Thursday, 16 December 2010 4:37 PM

As of now I am unemployed. My Principal wants me back in 2011, but I probably will not get a phone call from him to verify what is going on until just before school goes back. I guess that is why I am so frustrated. There are positions vacant in so many schools, but contract teachers like me cannot be placed until all the permanent teachers have been placed. I understand permanent teachers have the right to employment, but if a principal wants to have a contract teacher (like myself) on staff I do not see why the employing bodies make it so difficult for them to get us back year after year. I feel it is so unfair that we have to sit and wait every January holidays, to hear the news about our employment. I never really feel as though I can enjoy myself fully, as there is always the question of 'will I have employment come February?'

To: Bruce Johnson

From: Tania

Subject: Research

Sent: Thursday, 21st January 2012 6:08 PM

It is lovely to hear from you. Thank you for continually tracking me down and not forgetting about me. Knowing that you were doing this work inspired me to continue with teaching even when it did become difficult.

The good news is that I made it through 2011 with full employment; however, I did work in three different schools throughout the year. The last time I spoke to you I had an 8 week contract in a year 2 class at the same school I taught at in 2009. For the rest of term one I was able to gain consistent TRT work and from that I picked up a one term contract in a year 2/3 class at another school. Unfortunately, they were unable to keep me on, but they recommended me to yet another school which offered me a two term contract in a year 5/6/7 class. They were happy with my work and for the first time ever I was offered a contract for the following year (2012) BEFORE CHRISTMAS! It made such a difference. I was so relaxed over the holidays. I was able to leave all of my belongings at school and actually think about my class and start some planning. I have a full year contract in a year 3/4 class. I am not going to lie—it is a challenging school, but I have learnt a lot already. I think it will benefit my career having worked in a school like this. At last I feel like I actually have a career!

Commentary

Much has been written and said about the difficulties graduating teachers experience trying to secure ongoing employment. Despite media reports about an impending teacher shortage, the reality for most beginning teachers is that there are few full-time tenured jobs available; the most common entry point to the profession is through short-term contract work or relief teaching, usually in ‘difficult-to-staff’ schools in low socioeconomic or rural areas. The recruitment and selection policy of the largest employer of teachers in South Australia—the Department of Education and Child Development—

has made it very difficult for many excellent teachers to gain secure employment. For many teachers who cannot move to the country the only opportunities available are contract work, sometimes only available on an intermittent basis. The percentage of teachers under 45 years of age who are on contract sits at around 40 %, which is disproportionately high. (Department of Education and Children’s Services 2011, p. 2).

Similar problems exist for early career teachers in other jurisdictions, including Western Australia.

Many of the participants in this research told harrowing stories about dislocation, disappointment, disillusionment and despair over the ways they were treated as new teachers under policies that were perceived to be unfair, unresponsive and overly bureaucratic. In a tightening labour market, particularly at secondary level in the areas of mathematics, physics, chemistry, design and technology, and agricultural science, new policies are being implemented in most public education systems across Australia ‘to attract and retain the best teachers in a competitive market. ... Reform is needed to ensure that quality teachers are attracted to work in public education and have the opportunity to build a career in public education’ (Department of Education and Children’s Services 2011, p. 3). The early career teachers involved in this study will welcome these reforms.

Possibilities for Promoting Resilience

Employers, Unions, Universities and Other Professional Groups

Employers

- Continue to implement new recruitment and retention policies that seek to reduce the number of early career teachers in casual and short-term contract positions and increase the number of tenured positions.
- Remove recruitment procedures that rely on threats of ‘going to the bottom of the list’ if offers of employment in ‘difficult-to-staff schools’ are refused, and replace them with positive incentive schemes (locality allowances, above award payments, low rent quality housing, study leave and so on).

- Devolve greater authority to local schools to recruit teachers who best suit local school needs.

Unions

- Pursue Enterprise Agreements with employing authorities that require them to address the casualisation of the teaching profession and implement employment incentive schemes that benefit early career teachers.
- Promote the status of teaching in the community so that teaching becomes a profession of choice for able and committed young people.
- Provide more active support to graduate teachers seeking employment by providing practical advice about applying for employment, continuing to provide professional development for early career teachers, and assisting beginning teachers with career planning.

Universities

- Incorporate dedicated, practical and intensive ‘transition to the profession’ courses in the final year of pre-service awards.
- Establish and support teacher education alumni organisations to maintain contact with and support graduate teachers during the first few years after graduation.
- Provide more specific and practical learning activities that address the most commonly reported challenges faced by beginning teachers—managing difficult student behaviour, reporting to parents and writing student achievement reports.

School Leaders

- Actively lobby employment authorities, through their professional associations, for greater authority to employ teachers who best suit the needs of their schools.
- Establish a school culture that recognises and values the contributions of early career teachers.
- Implement local incentives to attract early career teachers to their schools, i.e., guaranteed relief teaching work for 1 day per week in term 1; inclusion in school professional development activities; practical help in applying for teaching positions.

Colleagues

- Help early career teachers understand local employment processes.
- Support their school leaders to implement local incentives to attract early career teachers.
- Welcome, value and support early career teachers during the first months of their appointments.

Early Career Teachers

- Invest time and effort in learning how employment processes operate so that they know how ‘the system works’ intimately and in detail.
- Establish relationships with local schools during their pre-service education so that they are well known and recognised as potential new teachers by those schools, i.e., do voluntary work at school, coach sporting teams, help out with excursions.
- Actively build and maintain personal and professional alliances with school leaders and teachers they work with during professional experience placements.
- Explicitly ask to be informed by local schools of any likely teaching vacancies so that they can prepare to apply for them.

Insights from Early Career Teachers

Quality Induction

There was an excellent induction process here. We had a full day induction at the start of the year. We had meetings, we got given staff handbooks, information packages and we had speakers from the business team telling us about pay, a timetabling guy came in and spoke to us, and the assistant principal came to speak to us. It was a huge amount of information in one day but we really appreciated the way all the paperwork was done, and my entire timetable was finalised too. (Jasmine)

Threatening Practices

I’m only on a contract so, I mean, who knows about next year? I wasn’t offered permanency even though my school is a remote Indigenous school that is impossible to staff. I put it down in my application as one of the hundreds of schools I’d go to, so when I got interviewed on the phone they said that if I declined it then I’d go to the bottom of the offer list and that’s a real threat. (Meg)

Waiting, Waiting...

I’ve spoken to the new principal, she said she wants me back, they definitely want me back. However, because it’s contract work, they can’t release it now otherwise they’ll get any displaced permanent teacher in, so I pretty much have to have some blind faith over the Christmas holidays and hope that, you know, they get in early enough next year and they offer it to me then. So they have to play a waiting game and not release the position too soon. It’s kind of looking quite positive that there will be another year contract to fill, but I don’t know if the school will play the game or get found out. So it’s a bit hard. (Tracey)

Insights from School Leaders

Bending the ‘Rules’

I use all the tricks I can to get who I want—take the staffing officer out to lunch, not declare vacancies until it’s too late to fill them with permanents, get final year pre-service teachers here to check the place out. I have to do these things to get the right people for this school, otherwise the kids suffer. (Anonymous)

Staffing Dilemmas

I guess I’ve got mixed feelings about local appointments, only because we are swamped by hundreds of names from the permanent teacher register. The last one we had here had a 340 teacher run that you then have to search through, to find those that best fit the criteria, so we did. But people like [our contract teacher] weren’t on that list. That’s our dilemma. (Colin)

Longer Contracts

In terms of new graduates ... when they do come back to the school, and this is one that I do manage—they go into the same grade level 2 years in a row. (Troy)

Wisdom from the Literature

Incentives, School Conditions and Teacher Retention

Liu et al. (2004) studied the effects of the Massachusetts \$20,000 bonus program over several years, and cited only ‘distant effects’ of the bonus on teachers’ decisions to stay in teaching. They concluded that the policy ‘focused too narrowly on recruitment and not enough on retention’ (p. 234). They attributed most teachers’ decisions to leave on the lack of structures and norms in the school to support teacher collaboration. (Baker-Doyle 2010, p. 3)

Recruitment and Retention

The literature and consultations clearly indicate that recruitment issues cannot be considered separately from retention issues. (Lonsdale and Ingvarson 2003, p. 38)

Practices That Constrain Resilience

Lack of Professional Development for Contract Teachers

I’m still expected to teach everything even though they are not going to provide me with in-service because I’m not permanent. They don’t want to waste money on me. Straight away I’m thinking during my first 24 h at the school—I felt like I’m only here as a fill-in and, you know, that’s where it got me thinking, like how am I ever going to get permanency. (Tania, ECT)

Selfish Colleagues

The sticky tape dispenser was missing along with lots of other stuff—it's a reality for new teachers. Often these poor bubs get the worst furniture, the worst materials and they have to suck it in because they're on contract and they probably want to get a job next year. (Margo, school leader)

Lack of Support from the Community

The break-in at the start of term 2 was pretty disheartening. They had written all this stuff about me, like "Fuck You" and my name, everywhere. That was like a big punch in the guts. Well, you know, you leave everything behind, all your family and your friends, to come out here and that kind of thing happens. You know, that was pretty disheartening. (Meg, ECT)

Lack of Due Process

So I rang the school and got the principal. She said, "Look we do need a teacher, the days are counting down, you're a great bloke" and "You made the phone call, you're the first one in", and so on. She asked how much experience I had. She probably knew me for ten minutes and didn't call my referees. But I still got the job!! I wondered whether things would end up all messy. (Brad, ECT)

Questions for Reflection and Conversations

- How would you respond to the following? 'Graduating teachers have no entitlement to a job. That's the reality'.
- In what ways has the casualisation of the teaching profession had adverse effects on the quality of teaching and learning in schools?
- How would you respond to the following? 'In the future we will have to think about graduating teachers differently. We will have to be more respectful and understanding of their aspirations if we are going to attract them and keep them. How we do that will impact on the quality of public education.'

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