



## Research article

## The good teacher's Odyssey

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## ABSTRACT

The manifestation of the good teacher is a contested discourse within international teacher education. The construct of good teacher emerges from research into teacher education and focuses on teacher quality and effectiveness [42]. While there is significant policy work internationally about the performativity and effectiveness of teachers' practice, there is limited research into the formation of a good teacher using a reflexive methodology. This paper reports on case studies of three Australian schools that comprise qualitative semi-structured interviews with ten beginning teachers. This study uses the construct of "a good teacher" to assess the contextual and professional factors that create good teaching. These case studies have been textually analysed for themes that inform the transition to teaching and ongoing construction of professional identity. The barriers and enablers to the development of good teaching are explored in this paper using Mockler's [20] epistemological framework that recognizes socio-cultural, personal and professional factors in the construction of good teaching. The study reveals the complexity of factors that influence the creation of a good teacher.

## 1. Introduction

Teacher Education since 2009 has become subject to increasing political pressure and reform. Internationally teacher effectiveness is subject to numerous reviews (see Ref. [1]; OECD, 2005; [2] ) The policy discourse targets the delivery of good teachers who are agile, effective and life-long learners. Factors such as self-efficacy, personal characteristics and external factors are recognised in several studies to be critical in the development of good teachers [3,4].

Internationally, the importance of good teaching is universally recognised with the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) development goals placing education as the imperative for all nations for the collective and individual benefit of a global society [5]. In the United Kingdom concerns about the state of teaching have increased the commodification and regulation of teaching with the National Curriculum in England (1988) and the heightened inspectorial surveillance of the Office for Standards in Education, Children Services and Skills (OFSTED) Within Australia this normative discourse has prevailed with the embodiment of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership -AITSL (2008) and the introduction of teacher performance assessments (2019) and descriptions of proficiency (2008-current).

Globally, teacher education has come under increasing government scrutiny and standardisation in the last two decades. Initial Teacher Education (ITE) providers are required to develop classroom ready teachers who can impact student learning in deep and substantive ways. However, present discourse in teacher education critiques the failure of providers to deliver high quality graduates

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who are classroom ready and effective. Therefore, efforts to produce and replicate the good teacher are of significant interest to policymakers, schools, and the teaching profession. This paper considers the multitude of factors that can create a good teacher using a case-study approach.

## 2. Literature review

The good teacher is a flawed construct about the role, moral purpose, and identity of teachers ([6,7];[8]). This discourse informs the educational experience of new teachers and their transition into teaching and is often reinforced by community expectations, and amongst teaching colleagues. The neo-liberalist heavy machinery of accrediting bodies and government regulators manufactures the career trajectory and shape of teaching within schools. Teachers' discipline, curricular and pedagogic knowledge, along with classroom performativity is measured, assessed, and reported on. In this regulated context good teaching is determined by a set of prescribed national teaching standards. These "managerial approaches" ([9], p. 9) are obscured by the language of professionalism and quality. Over-regulation and compliance of the entry into the teaching and who is considered proficient and beyond is purported to be for the greater common good of the children and young people in compulsory education. The "good teacher" is an excellent practitioner or expert that can be replicated across teacher education institutions and standardized across schools and sectors. However, increasingly the cultural and relational aspects of teaching are complex, nuanced and uncommodified. The messiness of the role, the transition to the profession and the enculturation processes are not universally reductive or easily unpacked.

Current conceptualisations of teaching professionalism are informed by sociological and occupational classifications and theories of work. Historically, teaching was an apprenticeship, a learned person or scholar who varying discipline knowledge to impact to less educated or younger students [10]. The craft of teaching was modelled and replicated and unregulated and of little influence or regard for the wider community. Teaching is considered a profession by the recognition of expert pedagogic and subject content knowledge, by the high levels of tertiary education, the quality and duration of placement days within schools and by its levels of pay and performance.

More recently, teacher professional identity is a key factor in understanding teachers' motivation, encouragement, professional lives, rational decision-making, attitudes, and professional development [11]. This identity involves teachers' knowledge, beliefs, values, and skills incorporated in the classroom [12]. Teacher professionalism is therefore predicated on teacher self-efficacy.

Teacher self-efficacy is influenced by personal beliefs about teaching effectiveness, career satisfaction and stability [13]. The research suggests that the higher the teacher self-efficacy the more likelihood of that teachers are able to deal with workplace and school related stressors and have a positive impact on student academic achievement [14]; [15]. These concepts are informed by Bandura's cognitive theory of self-efficacy [16]. Self-efficacy in teaching is enhanced with aspects of teacher self-reflexivity.

Self-reflection is related to self-awareness and teacher's ability to realise how choice of strategies, pedagogies, styles, even words and actions, can profoundly impact students' learning is a valuable tool to consider in everyday teaching life [17,18]. Through self-reflection, teachers better comprehend students' strengths and needs going forward. It allows teachers to acknowledge their improvement and builds self-efficacy and a growth in a teacher's professional identity [12].

However, a range of factors can inhibit teachers' capacity to be effective in the classroom and the opportunities for self-reflection [17]. Increasingly, the main inhibitor in teachers' work is task intensification [19]. Task intensification decreases opportunities for reflection and challenges how teacher use their time based on professional disciplinary and pedagogical knowledge. Compounding the issues of task intensification is the increasing burden of accreditation or regulation of teachers' work [20]. In essence, as teachers' work becomes more professionalised it has become increasingly performative. These performative aspects increase task intensification and lower teacher opportunities for self-reflection and the development of teacher self-efficacy [21].

### 2.1. Theoretical framework

This study used Mockler's [22] epistemological framework that suggests personal experience, professional and political context shapes teacher emergent identity. According to Mockler's [22] framework, teacher professional identity is shaped by three different constituents: one is the personal factor related to teachers' personal characteristics and to different aspects of their life such as race, gender, class, interests, hobbies, and specific family context that exist outside of the professional realm. Secondly, the professional factor is related to any experiences shaped within an education setting. Different features such as professional learning and development experiences and career experiences can impact teachers' professional selves. Lastly, the political context forms teacher identity comprising discourses, behaviours and perceptions around education that exist external to the profession. Ultimately, political ideologies impact the work of teachers as a result of government policy [22].

The Mockler [22] theoretical framework has been validated using a three study of teacher professional identity. This model presented by Mockler [22], p. 5) indicates that professional teacher identity includes the dimensions:

- Enhanced self-knowledge
- Reflection
- Professional Learning
- Professional Context
- Internal and External Engagement with the Profession.

At the centre of this model is the central notion of being a good and effective teacher.

### 3. Method

A qualitative research method was used to ascertain stakeholder views and experiences of the implementation, including contextual factors impacting on teacher identity, induction and transition (Stoll, 2020). This method was used to generate emergent themes across case study secondary schools. Case studies have been used to penetrate the nuances, contextual factors and dialogue of an authentic context [23]. This “insightful appreciation of the case” ([23], p. 2) will lead to valid insights into teacher transition to the profession. These case studies rely on narrative accounts from these new teachers. This method aligns with studies of teachers’ work [24].

These case studies of three secondary non-government Australian schools have been selected on the basis of their geographical demography, similar socio-economic index, co-educational student population and shared religious culture. The case studies comprise ten early career teacher participants who have shared experience of Initial Teacher Education and have been through a range of induction and mentoring experiences. Despite the similarity of the school and career stage variables, each participant comes from a wide range of situational learning, with varied subject teaching identities, genders and ages. The case study approach has been selected as it provides an exploratory framework to analyse the development of teacher identity and the transition to the profession.

Interviewing is one of the most frequently used methods when generating data in qualitative research [25]. Interviews can be used to obtain in-depth information about a participant’s thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, reasoning, motivations, and feelings [26]. Interviewing allows a researcher to enter into the inner world of another person and to gain an understanding of that person’s perspective [27]; providing a fuller picture of the phenomenon being investigated. However, interviewing a small number of participants only presents a small number of perspectives on the key research questions and has less generalizability than larger scale quantitative or purposeful sampling techniques. These limitations in this study must be weighed against the richness of the insights of the participants who were undertaking a transition to teaching at a particular period in time and within schools from similar socio-economic contexts.

In this case study ten early career teacher participants have been interviewed in each school using a semi-structured interview schedule. These interviews draw from a larger body of interviews across forty-eight participants from seventeen divergent schools. The interviews from these three case study schools have been audio recorded and transcribed. Emergent themes have been identified using content analysis and axial coding. The axial-coding is informed by the research methodology of Corbin & Strauss (2014) [28] that constantly compares the main themes extrapolating from theoretical models. In this study axial coding is informed by theories of teacher professionalism, identity and transition. The participants’ transcripts have been coded to show casual and explanatory relationships between enabling factors and barriers in the transition to teaching. This analysis process captures “general properties of a phenomenon and dimensional variation” ([29], p. 1).

#### 3.1. Case studies

These three case study schools are located in Sydney, Australia. All three schools are co-educational non-government secondary schools with students from Year 7 to Year 12. The three schools have a similar Community Socio-educational Advantage (ICSEA) categorisation. The ICSEA is a scale that shows the educational advantage or disadvantage that each student at a specific school brings from their family or home context. This advantage is predicated on the extant research that shows that a student’s academic performance is predicated to a large extent on characteristics such as parental education, parental non-education, occupation and the school’s socio-economic location.<sup>1</sup> The ICSEA is a scale that is calculated on a median of 1000 with a standard deviation of 100. ICSEA values or scales vary according to the advantage indicators from a school with a median scale of advantage scoring 500 to a school with a high rate of disadvantage being approximately a score of 1300.

The case study schools from 2016 to 2021 (see Table 1) have an average ICSEA score of 995 and larger student populations of 980 < 1300. The schools share religious faith tradition and are located within urbanised and residential areas within fast growing corridors of growth for New South Wales. The teaching profile of each school has 78 > 100 teachers with 6–8% of the teaching workforce being early career or recently graduated teachers. The three case study schools offer subjects to students across all eight Key Learning Areas (English, Mathematics, Science, Technology, Human Society and Its Environment, Performing and Visual Arts, Personal Development and Health Education and Languages) and Religion.

#### 3.2. Participants

Teacher participants (n = 10) have a range of teaching areas and discipline backgrounds across these Key Learning Areas (see Table 2). Some of these participant teachers are teaching out of field (without the necessary discipline knowledge and curriculum) and some are teaching their accredited teaching areas for the first time with a new class. All of these participant teachers are within their first two years of the profession and range from completing Initial Teaching Education qualifications to new graduates within the last two years. The teacher participants comprise (n = 7) female and (n = 3) male teachers.

The following research questions have been explored in this study:

- How do graduate teachers transition to good teachers?

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.myschool.edu.au/media/1820/guide-to-understanding-icsea-values.pdf>.

**Table 1**  
Features of the case study schools.

Case Study Features	Case Study 1 School A	Case Study 2 School B	Case Study 3 School C
ICSEA	994	995	992
Student Population	980	1155	1300
Number of teachers in the school	78	92	100
Subjects Taught	English Mathematics Science, Technology Human Society & Its Environment Performing and Visual Arts Personal Development & Health Education Languages Religion.	English Mathematics Science, Technology Human Society & Its Environment Performing and Visual Arts Personal Development & Health Education Languages Religion.	English Mathematics Science, Technology Human Society & Its Environment Performing and Visual Arts Personal Development & Health Education Languages Religion.

**Table 2**  
Participant profiles.

Pseudonym	Subject Taught	Gender	Number of Years Teaching
Aileen	English	Female	1 year
Lisa	History	Female	6 months
Vikki	Mathematics	Female	1.5 years
Debbie	Technology	Female	1.2 years
Aaron	PDHPE	Male	2 years
Nina	English	Female	1.6 years
Keira	Religion	Female	2 years
Gabriella	English	Female	1.8 years
Denis	Business Studies	Male	2 years
Jason	PDHPE	Male	1.8 years

- What are the factors that develop a good teacher?

### 3.3. Case study themes and analysis

This study grew out of an insightful and a reflective interest in the experiences of early career/beginning teachers transition to the teaching and ongoing construction of their professional identity in the context of a higher education in Australia. The research explores the experiences and practices of transitions to the teaching and considers the construct of teacher identity. A content analysis of key themes informing this transition and identity formation is presented. The themes identified comprise the following adopted from Mockler [22] framework about teacher professionalism (see Table 3):

## 4. Analysis

### 4.1. Theme: motivation to teach

The transition to become a good teacher in the data seemed predicated on intrinsic and individual interest and motivation to teach and contribute to student learning and growth. The data indicated that as new teachers, having a personal commitment and goal to support students enabled a more effective transition to teaching.

During the first encounter/interview with Aileen at Mulberry College, she opened up about her experiences leading to teaching profession:

**Table 3**  
Key themes using Mockler [22] framework.

Personal	Professional	Practical
Motivation to teach Self-Reflection	Professional Identity Induction and Mentoring Collaboration and Relational Mentoring in schools.	Challenges of Schools and Classrooms Subject Content Knowledge
Teacher Self-Efficacy	Teacher Accreditation	Task Intensity

I really enjoy the relationship with the students. Seeing their, I think some of the biggest rewards is when you really touch a student and have, you change something about them for the positive whether it be their attitude towards school, they discover something they didn't know they could do or didn't know they would enjoy and then really found a passion in it and or you see a student's learning growth (Aileen).

As the conversation unfolded, Aileen spent some time reminiscing about how her background knowledge assisted her in the teaching profession. Aileen's passion about teaching and students is evident in her words which is indicative of her immense passion about teaching.

Lisa from Lily College had similar motivations and ambitions to teach:

The reason why I wanted to do teaching is because I had a passion for it, I had a passion, every day was a challenge, every day would be something new. It put me on my toes, instead of me being in this comfortable environment doing the same thing day in and day out. Not so much a well-liked teacher, but a well-respected teacher who had passion, but who just didn't see teaching as a 9–3 job, ....that's what I wanted" (Lisa).

Lisa's aspirations for teaching endeavouring to be a destination of choice to cater for all students with utmost ability regardless of their background was outstanding. As the conversation unfolded, she ensured to provide a teaching and learning context for them to thrive.

Aileen had similar mindset as Lisa and her background profoundly impacted her perspective towards teaching and the profession:

When I was at school, I had a teacher who was approachable and really catered for the individual needs of students, and in my experience, he catered for my individual needs, and rather than a teacher who just deals with the classes ... students. And I want to be a teacher that sort of focuses on the individual students and maybe try and know them well and know where they're at and how they learn best and being able to cater for them. So that's sort of what I've sort of imagined what teaching would be" (Aileen, Mulberry College).

When pupils enter the school and the classroom, they encounter different challenges to cope with including creating positive rapport with peers and adults as well as meeting the high demand of learning tasks. It is consequently imperative for teachers to provide students with caring, safe environment so they can open up and work to the best of their abilities. This is what Debbie from Wattle College been referring to though she considers the challenges associated with creating this sort of environment.

It is of great interest to observe that despite challenges around motivation, these early career teachers did their best to cater for inclusive classes. Motivation is a phenomenon closely correlated with teachers' professional development. This motivation as a very important matter is interrelated with responsibilities teachers have regarding student's knowledge, abilities, engagement etc.

#### 4.2. Theme: professional identity

The transition to teaching seemed highly co-related with constructs of professional identity. This identity assists teachers in growing consciousness about how they can enrich and enhance their work, and how they can deepen pedagogical content material perception and reform it if need be. Certainly, teachers utilise this identity to educate themselves especially throughout their practicum journey, to reform activities, and to keep passionate about education. However, this identity can be conceptualised and constantly reconstructed and interrelated to teachers' performances. This means teacher professional identity can be affected by social relationships and the context, but the main contribution to its construction and reconstruction comes from the individual teacher himself through self-efficacy, self-reflection, interpretation etc [30].

A significant factor which Vikki from Lily College believes is prominent in being a quality teacher. It is much related to developing one's skills inside and outside of a classroom:

A quality teacher is someone who is very well trained in their curriculum, in what they're teaching, so content, but also can provide something to their students beyond that. So, it's not just learning content, it's about developing skills and seeing them, and I truly believe seeing them as a whole learner, like it's not just about knowing English or maths, it's all about how this can help you in life and how can we get you ready for life outside the classroom (Lisa).

It seems teacher professional identity can develop self-awareness, a greater understanding of teachers' skills to assist students in their learning journey. Nina another teacher from Lily College further indicated when she was asked about the most pressing professional developments needs for teachers in like their first, say three years of teaching:

I think it's beyond just understanding their KLA; it is about the process of teaching. Of how you know to develop – I think you've got to be true to yourself as a teacher. I think you need to learn to be true to yourself. You try to pretend as a teacher the kids cotton on very quickly. So, you need to be ... to yourself but you need to work out how you can get things done within your style. And I think that's a thing that would be the nicest – it's really difficult to teach that (Nina, Lily College)).

It seems both early career teachers believe the same. Teacher professional identity encompasses how teachers and educators perceive themselves as a teacher and what they see to be a quality teacher. They need to be driven towards students' needs and growth, allowing them to connect, to succeed, and to thrive in their learning. It is of great interest to see how Aileen from Mulberry College

reports on this matter:

I guess I'm a pretty enthusiastic happy teacher. I like them (students) to take some responsibility for their learning and I think learning through discovery is really important because I think when you discover something or work out you can do something is when you tend to remember it (Aileen).

As all the early career teachers have referred to, while one of the key factors of teaching is to inspire students, teachers need to work on their teaching skills going beyond the content only and being able to transfer this to students. Ultimately, quality teachers carry good intentions and believe they can make a huge difference in the lives of students.

#### 4.3. Theme: self-reflection

Findings indicated that the concept of self-reflection lies at the centre of the discourse about good teaching. It has been argued that consciousness and self-awareness of one's teaching practice are the main central aspects that comprise the make-up of self-reflection. It furnishes teachers to objectively look at their emotions, feelings, thoughts, and actions associated to teaching. It gives this opportunity to teachers to realise if their strengths, weakness, strategies, and pedagogies work for students or not. It also enables teachers to perceive students' reactions to this teaching and learning cycle.

Importantly, it is one of the top priorities to provide students the quality education to ensure they are thriving. Early career teachers learn a lot of theoretical knowledge in university, but as a practicum student, they are in doubt which one to use and best fits the needs until they enter the classroom and deliver a lesson to see the practical side of it. This is what Lisa from Lily College says:

So, I think I've evolved the way I teach now from the initial training. You're just trying to get the hang of – just the whole way you run at lesson and making sure everything is smooth. You cover all the points; you cover the lesson plan and make sure they – you follow it. I was very regimental about my lesson plan to start off with and I was very rigid towards that. And I was not happy at all if I didn't hit that point – that I wanted to hit it (Lisa, Lily College).

It seems Lisa has this fixated mindset of following the lesson plan as taught in different units while studying. When involved in teaching, teachers need to ensure to reflect on their practice, becoming more self-aware of the students and their needs.

Moreover, sometimes this self-reflection can be strengthened along with the help of a mentor or a colleague who can increase one's self-reflection and push the teacher to some areas of improvement. Aaron from Mulberry College believes

So, I think the main change from my first year to my second year of teaching was having a different mentor, having a KLA Coordinator who supported risk taking and really pushed student centred and project-based learning, and then having that person to be able to provide advice that follows that same line of thinking. That really helped me I suppose regain what I thought teaching was supposed to be (Aaron).

It is crucial to take into consideration reflecting on the lesson, materials integrated, students' engagement, managing students and behavioural issues, managing the class to ensure students are on-task for most of the time. Sometimes you realise you need to change your teaching styles, maybe change add, eliminate, and modify some classroom expectations to handle students.

Nina from Lily College declares

I think maybe there's things that I would have done differently coming into, if I had to go to another school and start fresh, I would've maybe worked differently with those students right at the very beginning to set that culture of my classroom. So maybe not being as friendly with the students, maybe being a little bit more strict so they know this is how the rest of the year is going to follow (Nina).

#### 4.4. Theme: teacher self-efficacy

Self-Efficacy was identified in the data as an important factor in the development of teacher identity. In this study teacher participants showed how growing self-efficacy resulted in improved student outcomes. Aldo reflected on a student who was experiencing many learning challenges or 'problems.' Aldo spent time persisting with the student and understanding the student's needs. As a result, the student showed sustained development in writing tasks. This additional persistence of Vikki suggests a high level of intrinsic motivation and high self-efficacy to actuate change. The result was for Vikki 'but it made me feel good that he tried and in other classes.'

In contrast other teacher participants described the "emotional draining" of teaching and how it fatigued and overwhelmed them to deal with 'kids' and people all day. Gabriella from Wattle College exhibits lower self-efficacy and is struggling to get through a full day of teaching. Self-efficacy and motivation in the literature are linked and have impact on career transition and development. When teachers show care and concern for their students it manifests a high level of willingness to persevere and commit to action. As Denis from Wattle College suggests the passionate teachers are highly motivated; 'the reason why I wanted to do teaching is because I have a passion for it ....' As Barni et al. (2019) [31] indicates self-autonomous teachers whose motivation is driven by passion, individual commitment or desire for student and personal success experience higher self-efficacy [31]. Other factors that can influence self-efficacy are enablers such as self-reflexivity staff or peer collaboration and formal induction and mentoring programs.

#### 4.5. Theme: subject content knowledge

Teacher participants' subject content and pedagogic knowledge was identified as a critical factor in the transition to teaching. While some teachers were teaching using their discipline backgrounds, frequently early career teachers were teaching out of field with limited knowledge and understanding of the key learning area content. Denis identifies that some content and course areas were particularly challenging such as Year 12 areas or Vocational Training courses.

It was very – it was very hard. I was teaching a VET subject for one of the year 12s sports coaching, and VET is completely different to Board of Studies subjects, and I just – like I'm still kind of struggling to get my head around it and all the compliance and things the TAFE needs. It was very daunting and had to have all this paperwork (Denis, Wattle College).

Clearly, the teacher participants who lacked pedagogic or content knowledge felt overwhelmed and less effective in their classroom practice. The lack of effectiveness can be a trigger for decreased self-efficacy and can have a detrimental effect on student learning. This sense of being out of their depth was exacerbated by the rigour of the accreditation processes as well.

#### 4.6. Theme: challenges of schools and classrooms

Emerging from the data was the strong connective role played by student and teacher relationships. Teachers have the most fundamental role in students' lives. They greatly contribute to educating responsible people of a country. They can mould and shape students' characters and impact their lives and their future. This makes teaching an appreciated and cherished job, but at the same time challenging and full of responsibility. Teachers come across many different obstacles, hindrances, impediments, and challenges regardless. One of the challenges is managing behavioural issues in a class. Each student comes from different divisions of society and background and unveil different behaviours. Knowing and understanding students and their problems, adapting to their needs, and catering for their needs along with apt guidance can be quite challenging for teachers and time consuming. According to Vikki from Lily College

juggling the different types of students, you have in your class in terms of, like I wasn't prepared for the mental issues and the special needs students as well as the bright ones in the class. Like you have one class that has a mixture, and you just think how on earth can I do this, it's very challenging because you don't know where to be and how to structure your lessons and stuff. Which I, uni didn't really prepare you for that, from my view, so it was hard, yeah (Vikki).

One of the other challenges early career teachers refer to in the interview is the power of adaptability from gaining theoretical knowledge to putting theories into practice. What students learn in the university can be quite different to what they experience while on teaching ground. It is imperative for teachers to understand the discipline knowledge but understanding how to adapt this in different contexts is more crucial. A teacher needs to be able to understand this knowledge, formulate it, but construct and amend it according to students' needs. According to Keira

I think one of the biggest challenges is I found that a lot of the things in a sense that we learnt from uni went out the window, once I started teaching. But a lot of strategies that we got, I think, the other thing also is more experience. Like I know we have the 10-week block and then the casual work, and whatever else. But I think more experience, more hands-on. Because I've picked up so much more actually having hands on than I did sitting in during a lecture (Kiera, Lily College).

Moreover, it is so obvious that teaching is a demanding profession. Constant pressure and workload can lead to burnout and mental health problems for teacher. Feeling drained after long hours of work, not looking forward to work the day after, and thinking about leaving the profession can be the sign of burnout in educators. This is what Jason from Mulberry College declares:

you know the one thing that resonates though I always seem to say is emotional draining, you know what I mean it takes a lot out of you just dealing with people all day and kids in particular can be particularly draining on your mental resources (Jason).

#### 4.7. Theme: induction and mentoring

Supportive mentoring and induction processes within the case study schools were noted to have a protective influence on the teacher participants' self-efficacy and successful transition to teaching. The participants used words like "lucky, positive, good, great" to describe their experience of mentoring. Debbie went further to define the how the support should be provided, 'it would be good if early in the year the principal or mentor would meet with us' and we could "ask random questions" (Debbie, Wattle College). The relational aspect of the mentor was also very important. Having an open, accessible mentor who would share practice and open the doors of their classroom to the new teacher was highly significant. Being approachable as a mentor was 'really important' (Debbie).

#### 4.8. Theme: collaboration and relational mentoring in schools

Enabling factors that supported the transition to good teaching were identified in mentoring and collaborative school cultures and relationships. These mentoring relationships that built on shared practice, respect and openness enabled strong collaboration processes and cultures at the case study schools. The collaboration could be informal but was seen as a form of coaching or encouragement. Jason from Mulberry College explains that his staff colleague "was real easy to talk to" (Jason). Mentoring programs build on collaboration



were new to many of the teacher participants. These collaborative supports were absent in the Initial Teacher Education from the university. The formal induction programs of schools and the emphasis on fostering school culture was a key feature of this support. Debbie described this induction as a formal collaborative time and space at that happened every Wednesday for the 'new trainees' to help them to get into "the swing of things" (Debbie, Wattle College).

However, not all case study schools offered a consistent or comparable process of induction, collaboration or mentoring. The inconsistency of this resonated with several teacher participants who felt abandoned by their school and peers. According to Gabriella (Wattle College) there was 'very poor support for new teachers.' Her experience was very negative and seemed to impact on her capacity for growth. Similarly, other teacher participants identified with informal mentors rather than those appointed. Collaborative peer to peer mentoring was seen as more valuable than the formal structured programs offered by the school to new graduates.

#### 4.9. Theme: task intensity

Barriers to good teaching were identified in the workload and daily task intensity of teaching. In this study early career teachers expressed a degree of shock at the 'paperwork, 'admin' and 'accountability'. According to Nina (Lily College)

Probably the admin side of things, the paperwork and the accountability, like all the registers and compliance and things like that is a bit overwhelming, and it's completely foreign when you first see it.

The teacher participants acknowledged that 'teachers are more accountable now' and there is a lot happening with curriculum changing and professional learning (Keira). Terms such as 'a lot more responsibility, documentation and keeping records' were used by all teacher participants. There is a conflation with teacher professionalism and the documentation (Gabriella). This was reiterated by Jason who felt as though he was 'being pulled away from the core responsibility and that's teaching. 'This task intensification was seen as distraction to teaching or a replacement for teaching and jarred with early career teachers' sense of teacher identity and purpose.

#### 4.10. Theme: teacher accreditation

Currently early career teachers in Australia undertake a rigorous process of accreditation from graduate teacher to proficient teacher within 1–5 years of completing their initial teacher education course. This process involves supervised lessons, an annotated portfolio of evidence and support from the school or school system for their progression. It does provide additional pay and career recognition once proficiency has been achieved. However, the teacher participants had a range of supports and views towards this process. Nina (Lily College) felt excluded from the support while Denis was it was similar to the standards for accounting or law (Wattle College). Debbie described the process as anxiety causing and distressing as she was often teaching out of area and Nina described this as not "much good" someone coming to see a singular lesson infrequently. There was also some mistrust in the guidance and the advice of mentors who did not seem very familiar with these processes of accreditation. This anxiety decreased these participants' self-efficacy and did not seem to result in increased professionalism or actualisation of teacher identity.

## 5. Discussion

In considering the research question of how graduate teachers transition to become a good teacher two main findings were identified:

1. The formation of a professional teaching identity is a critical component on a successful transition to be a good teacher;
2. Adaptability in applying theory to classroom contexts was necessary in the transition stages.

Emerging from the data of the three case study schools is the significance of teacher professional identity in the construct of a good teacher [32]. Seemingly, teacher professional identity is a developmental process mediated through the practices and enculturation of the schools [22]. Providing the space for early career teachers to actualise into 'good teachers' was a powerful enabling condition with positive benefits for individual participants and the collective professional body of teachers [33]. In some cases, this lack of support was perceived as highly negative and damaging. Partly, these perceptions reflect the school context where students may need additional support and care due to socio-cultural background factors. Importantly, despite the limited enabling conditions of this case study school, the impact of a positive mentor had some influence on early career teachers' self-efficacy. As noted in the literature self-efficacy produces both self-actualisation and resilience which are both extremely useful in dealing with challenges [15]. The process of becoming an accredited or proper teacher were seemingly impervious for some of these teacher participants. Yet their willingness to persist and seek out support signifies that individual control and self-efficacy can assist in overcoming contextual barriers.

The transition to a good teacher required participants to adapt their theoretical learning to the classroom and apply pedagogical subject content knowledge. While across the three case study schools there were opportunities for classroom or work-based learning, in some schools the early career teacher was teaching outside their field or discipline. It is evident from the literature that teaching outside the field creates barriers to the development of teacher competence and confidence in the learning and curricula. Having a curriculum mentor who could navigate these experiences was shown to be helpful and seemed to ameliorate the situation and sense of fear of the participants.

Factors that developed good teaching were often cultural and specific to school contexts where time and collaborative support was provided. Specifically these factors included:



1. The establishment of positive and connected student teacher relationships enabled the construct of good teaching.
2. Collaborative cultures and mentoring effectively supported the transition to teaching.

Creating positive learning environments and developing good student teacher relationships through student centred learning was highly valued on this context. The happiness and collaborative aspects of the case study school adhered new teachers to the environment and made them willing to lean into these new environments and classrooms. Clearly, collaboration that nurtured participants and made schools supportive places of learning facilitated the transition to teaching [34].

The case study participants across all schools were the quality mentoring and collaborative cultures built their teacher psyche and professionalism assisting their transition to become a good teacher ([6]; [7]; [35]). The experience of each participant seemed largely dependent on the alignment of the mentor and mentee and to a certain extent the time and resource allocation of the school. The relational aspects of mentoring are identified within the literature as being critically important [33]. This finding suggests that may need to be additional time build into the school's selection of experienced mentors.

Barriers to the successful transition to teaching that significantly impeded the development of a good teacher were:

1. Task and work intensity and teacher fatigue.
2. Standardisation and regulation of teacher work and practice.

Task intensification was universally identified across all case study schools as an area that early career teachers struggled with. This collaborates existing international data about the pressures and overwhelming workload of teachers [36]; [37]. All case study schools seemed to contribute or fail to limit this inherent professional workload on new teachers despite seemingly being aware of the documentation and administration required. The singularity of this experience for early career teachers across schools suggests there is a need for some oversight or controls at a school or system level to assist new teachers. This work intensification is consistent with findings from the OECD [38] that show the complexity and volume of teachers' work is not well understood by regulators of teaching [37].

Accreditation processes internationally contribute to the task intensity of teaching [39,40]. This is an important finding as the professional landscape for all early career teachers within Australia to journey through the 37 standards is the same but the reality of how this can be achieved can be mediated and actively facilitated by the school. In this study this regulation of teachers' work and career progression limited the time and resources that early career teachers had to prepare lessons, develop resources and improve their craft. The regulatory practices intended to qualify the value of teaching in these early transition periods were frequently perceived as a barrier that limited teaching growth. Clearly, there are important factors for schools to consider when employing those new to the profession in this space.

## 6. Limitations

This study focuses on three case study schools and does not track the teachers' transitions to the profession over time. The data is reflexive and is based on teacher experiences. The reliance on interview qualitative data however makes the findings less generalisable to other teachers or schools. The case study approach used the theoretical framework to explain and provide insights into the construct of a good teacher from this epistemological lens. The limitation should be noted in any analysis and evaluation of the study. The findings are limited to the contexts and culture of individual case study schools.

## 7. Conclusion

The experience of journey to a good teacher is influenced by many factors such as professional identity, collaboration, the context of the school, individual pedagogical subject knowledge, self-efficacy. External factors such as accreditation and task intensification also impact on this process. The literature suggests these external factors are pre-determined and standardised by policy context, and regulatory authorities [41,42]. Yet this study shows the mediation and influence of the school context and support.

The findings from these case study schools suggest that good teaching is not by accident but more about purposeful intent of the school to enculturate and sustain the work of new teachers. This can be achieved through allocation of formal resources, shared conversations, quality mentoring programs and input from approachable and knowledgeable mentors and coaches. Smoothing the pathway for all early career teachers by guiding them through difficult curriculum, accreditation or school protocols is critical to ensure greater traction and commitment to continue teaching. Where schools provided uneven, rocky paths with crevices that could have been avoided or removed, it increased the degree of uncertainty or uneasiness in the early career teacher. This led to a decline in teacher self-efficacy. Similarly, where there was practical support and collaboration readily available early career teachers exhibited improved resilience and confidence [43]. As the literature suggests these enabling conditions provide greater alignment to the professional dimensions of teaching and are more likely to build a sustainable teaching profession for the future [44].

Furthermore, these case studies show that is in the relational spaces and collaborative practices that the transition to teaching occurs rather than in the formalised benchmarking, quality assurance processes, task intensification and public accreditation cycles. Clearly these neo-liberalist practices or managerial approaches to develop early career teachers are not performing the intended function ([45]; [1]). These case studies reveal a new model for how to create and sustain the good teacher.

## CRediT authorship contribution statement

**Kay Carroll:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft. **Pegah Marandi:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft. **Katarina Tuinamuna:** Writing – review & editing.

## Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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