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A summary of initiatives to address teacher shortages in hard-to-staff schools in the Anglosphere

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ABSTRACT

This article brings together a number of key issues that emerge in research around the problem of teacher shortages in hard-to-staff schools. It offers a broad overview of the hard-to-staff schooling sector as discussed in recent academic literature and provides a context-specific overview of the literature around workforce shortages in hard-to-staff schools with relevancy for high poverty contexts. In line with Williams et al. (2022) position on “Local Strategies, Global Inspiration,” this paper focuses on the problem of teacher shortages in hard-to-staff schools in Australia while looking to both Australian and broader Anglosphere literature (p.120) to reconsider responses to teacher recruitment and retention. The paper begins with a survey of the current state of this issue of workforce shortages in hard-to-staff schools in Australia. Turning our attention to literature from both Australia and Anglosphere countries, the summary then focuses on the specific initiatives and mechanisms employed for recruiting and retaining teachers in hard-to-staff schools, particularly the organisational contributions of Initial Teacher Education that support recruitment into hard-to-staff schools. The article concludes by highlighting limitations and critiques of hard-to-staff initiatives in the literature to inform policy and organisational considerations when addressing the issue of teacher shortages going forward.

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The issue of workforce shortages in hard-to-staff schools in Australia

Heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic, teacher shortages have garnered increased attention at the international level (UNESCO, 2023), with a worsening of shortages identified in Anglosphere countries such as the United States (Schmitt & Dourcy, 2022) and the United Kingdom (Worth, 2023). This article brings together a number of key issues that emerge in research around the problem of teacher shortages in hard-to-staff schools. It offers a broad overview of the hard-to-staff schooling sector as discussed in recent academic literature and provides a context-specific overview of the literature around workforce shortages in hard-to-staff schools with relevancy for high poverty contexts. In line with Williams et al. (2022) position on “Local

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Strategies, Global Inspiration,” this paper focuses on the problem of teacher shortages in hard-to-staff schools in Australia while looking to both Australian and broader Anglosphere literature (Legrand, 2021, p. 120) to reconsider responses to teacher recruitment and retention.

In Australia, the persistent problem of quality teacher preparation, recruitment and retention, especially in hard-to-staff schools and vulnerable communities (Burnett & Lampert, 2016; Halsey, 2018) has also been exacerbated in recent years (Department of Education, 2023, p. 3). In terms of teacher recruitment, rural, regional, and remote schools in Australia have long faced particular difficulties with attracting teachers (Cuervo & Acquaro, 2018), as have urban schools in disadvantaged areas (Rice et al., 2017). In the state of New South Wales, for example, the extensive teacher vacancies in the public system are disproportionately found in schools with a below average score on the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA), which is indicative of the socio-educational backgrounds of students attending. In addition, schools with the greatest number of vacancies tend to be in low socio-economic (LSES) areas. High levels of poverty are a common factor in determining whether a school is hard to staff; however, the specific characteristics that impact on whether a school attracts or can retain teachers differ and are place-based. While regional, rural and remote schools in Australia may experience staffing issues related to such things as isolation or lack of services including housing and health facilities, urban or metropolitan schools can also be hard to staff for other reasons including negative bias around teaching in schools with high rates of linguistic and cultural diversity. Schools in remote Indigenous communities, which shamefully experience the highest proportions of poverty in Australia, have for some time experienced significant recruitment issues (Brasche & Harrington, 2012). It is worth mentioning that 34.3% of principals of schools with large or exclusive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student populations have reported “major difficulty” filling vacancies with suitable teaching staff, compared to 6.7% of principals at other schools (McKenzie et al., 2014). Hence, it is clear that teacher shortages often intersect with issues such as poverty and disadvantage, limiting student’s educational experiences and pathways to employment.

Teacher attrition and its impact on high-poverty, hard-to-staff schools and vulnerable communities has also been explored in the literature (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Mason & Poyatos Matas, 2015; McKinnon, 2016). While reports are varied, the rate of loss to the profession in many countries within the Anglosphere, including Australia, the UK, England, and the US is often reported to be around 40–50% over the five years post entry into the teaching workforce (Gallant & Riley, 2014; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2006). In Australia specifically, recent estimates about the levels of attrition vary amongst reports and differ between geographic locations. At a national scale, it is often estimated that around 25–50% of teachers leave the profession within the first five years of their career, although these figures are debated (Allen et al., 2019; Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2016). In the state of Queensland, estimates of early career attrition rates range from 8% to 50% (Halsey, 2018; Niesche, 2019; Queensland College of Teachers, 2013), while in Victoria, where teachers are employed initially on short-term contracts, attrition rates are extremely difficult to determine as teachers whose contracts expire are not captured in the attrition data (Weldon, 2018).

While teacher and school leader retention issues and shortages exist across the board, especially in many regional, rural, and remote schools, such shortages particularly impact certain subject areas including STEM (especially Mathematics and Technology) and Special Education. For example, there is a high proportion of teachers teaching out-of-field subjects in LSES schools. Du Plessis et al. (2015) note this requirement often falls disproportionately on early career or novice teachers and has significant impacts on their self-efficacy, confidence, and desire to remain in the school. Following this, the students who are most likely to miss out on the benefits of a stable teaching workforce are far more likely to be from historically disadvantaged backgrounds, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, or from rural and remote communities (Hall, 2012; Holden & Zhang, 2018). This is a particular issue for Indigenous students, since a stable and culturally knowledgeable teaching workforce has been identified as a factor that assists with “closing the gap” (Halsey, 2018; Luke et al., 2013). This is also the case in New Zealand, where the ability to attract and retain quality teachers is seen as crucial to addressing the impact of colonisation and racism (Ell, 2021). Thus, much of the research on hard-to-staff schools is underpinned by equity concerns since it is schools with already disadvantaged student populations that are most commonly and severely impacted by teaching shortages, which in turn negatively affects these students’ academic outcomes and educational environments (Burton & Johnson, 2010; Opfer, 2011).

Adding to long-standing concerns, there is emerging evidence that the extraordinary COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated disparities between advantaged and disadvantaged schools (Cullinane & Montacute, 2020), contributing to an increase teacher attrition among those already identified as hard-to-staff. Fray et al.’s (2023) early research on the impacts of the pandemic on teachers in New South Wales, for example, observed negative effects on teacher self-efficacy in relation to student engagement and morale. They state: “The rapid shift from schooling-as-usual to learning from home caused a sharp intensification of teachers’ workloads” (Fray et al., 2023, p. 719) that did not subside when lockdowns ended. While Fray et al. did not identify additional issues impacting on low ICSEA schools, they did note further problems for teachers in rural and remote schools, such as unreliable internet.

Meanwhile, Beames et al. (2021) has highlighted that amidst a range of challenging working conditions for teachers, LSES and non-metropolitan schools and students are less likely to have the resources – such as adequate access to technologies, among others – to assist with online and non-face-to-face learning, thus increasing difficulties for teachers to plan and deliver classes. Such factors leave school leaders with an exhausted, burnt-out staff, many of whom consider leaving the profession (Ballantyne & Retell, 2019; Heffernan et al., 2022).

Yet even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, there were dire predictions about serious Australian teacher shortages or what the Australian Council of Deans of Education called a “teacher exodus” (Aspland, 2016), with others referring to this phenomenon as “the revolving door” (Ingersoll, 2001) or “teacher churn” (Sorensen & Ladd, 2018). Whether the focus is on hard-to-staff metropolitan schools or regional, rural, or remote schools (Halsey, 2018), most of the existing policy and research on teacher turnover makes it clear that the expectations of teachers, including their extensive workloads, their emotional labour and the sheer impossibility of working in an understaffed setting may make the work of teachers difficult beyond anything mere resilience is able to solve (Buchanan et al.,

2013). As mass teacher strikes take place and fears of extreme teacher shortages are reported (McGowan, 2021) there is little doubt that such issues are likely to get even worse as we move through the post COVID-19 context.

Hard-to-staff schools in the research literature

Defining “hard-to-staff” schools in Australia and other Anglosphere countries (those with a shared Anglo and English-speaking history (Legrand, 2021, p. 120) poses its own important issues worthy of examination. As Opfer (2011) noted more than a decade ago, “the literature has not attempted to systematically define and identify schools that are hard-to-staff, rather, writings on this topic tend to assume that schools with certain school-level characteristics are hard-to-staff” (p. 584). While many studies use large scale system-based administrative data to identify schools (and categories of schools) with quantifiable recruitment and retention issues as “hard-to-staff” (for examples, see Bastian & Marks, 2017; Dupriez et al., 2016; See et al., 2004), the issue of more non-specific or broad understandings of certain schools as belonging to said category continues to be apparent in the literature. Much research in this field approaches the concept of “hard-to-staff” in a range of less direct ways. Namely, schools that are identified as “challenging,” “disadvantaged,” “underserved,” “high-needs,” “high-poverty,” “LSES,” and “low-performing” are often presented as indicative or even synonymous with a school that is hard to staff. This contrasts with “easy-to-staff” schools, which have many more applicants for jobs than available positions, low levels of staff turnover, effective administration and leadership, and good reputations (Glazer, 2021). These schools are generally well resourced with more high-performing, high socioeconomic status students. Heffernan (2021) addresses how some schools are seen to be “preferred” in a recent study of principal turnover in hard-to-staff Australian schools, noting how “research has established that schools in challenging contexts are often used as ‘stepping stones’ to more desirable locations” (p. 2). Heffernan also notes the importance of contextual understandings of specific schools rather than relying on broad descriptions of certain types of schools as “challenging” and thus hard-to-staff.

Opfer (2011), however, has cautioned that school-level or community characteristics do not inherently make a school hard-to-staff and suggests literature often uncritically conflates demographic factors such as student populations from low income or racially diverse communities with problems filling teaching positions and/or high attrition rates, without considering other contributing issues. For example, the widely used term “urban” is often deployed in US literature in an ill-defined or coded way to connote a challenging or undesirable teaching environment (Anderson & Stillman, 2013; Matsko & Hammerness, 2014). While this relationship between demographics and staffing issues often exists, considering this connection as always causal and total can be limiting. Supporting this, Grissom (2011) notes that “prior studies have overestimated the association between student demography and satisfaction and turnover” (p. 2576). Alternatively, there are some teachers (often teachers of colour or teachers who grew up in low income and/or rural settings themselves) who are drawn to these schools (Achinstein et al., 2010; Burton & Johnson, 2010; Ronfeldt et al., 2016). Meanwhile, Simon and Johnson (2015) argue that working conditions and organisational dysfunction are more likely to impact teacher turnover than student demographics, with the interaction of organisational factors,

such as lack of administrative support or opportunities for career development, playing an important role in relation to staffing (see also Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Johnson et al., 2012; Viano et al., 2021). Opfer (2011) therefore concludes:

How we define hard-to-staff matters. The characteristics of a hard-to-staff school vary depending on the definition used. Thus, we need to be more specific in defining hard-to-staff schools so that both research on these schools and resource targeting by policy makers yield better results. (p. 583)

The most comprehensive overview of the various strategies implemented to address the issue of an unprepared, overstressed, burnt-out, and transient quality teaching workforce in historically hard-to-staff schools is See et al. (2020a) meta-analysis. Their review focused on 20 research reports (mostly US) on challenging schools or areas that have difficulties with recruitment and retention, including those in rural and remote or high-poverty areas, as well as low-performing schools and schools where certain subjects are hard-to-staff. Based on research that employed a causal or suitable comparative design to evaluate policies and interventions aimed at attracting and retaining teachers in hard-to-staff schools, See et al. (2020a) identified financial incentives, alternative routes to teaching, induction and mentoring programmes, professional development, and leadership support as reoccurring approaches to addressing teacher shortages. Significantly, their analysis of research on hard-to-staff schools specifically concluded that there is a dearth of strong, evidence-based research determining the effectiveness of any of the common approaches to addressing this issue. More broadly, See et al. (2020b) additional meta-analysis of 120 empirical reports focusing on the same issue of retention and recruitment in teaching, taking into account all schools rather than just hard-to-staff ones, echoed these findings. Due to the many distinct contextual factors around this issue in the US, it is worth noting that the findings in the literature are not always generalisable to all national contexts as factors that make a school hard-to-staff are often place-specific and due to this, so must be their solutions (Somerville et al., 2010).

Not captured, by design, in either See et al. (2020a) or See et al. (2020b) is the more expansive body of smaller scale qualitative studies and conceptual work on teacher recruitment and retention in hard-to-staff contexts. This type of work, in comparison to empirical or large-scale qualitative work, constitutes the bulk of the research in this area, at least in the Australian context. Mason and Poyatos Matas (2015) explain that the Australian work on teacher attrition, “has reached the point where a critical review of the existing literature is needed to better understand the current state of the field of teacher attrition and to develop a research agenda” (p. 46). It is with this in mind that we turn our attention to a summary consideration of the organisational responses, initiatives, and mechanisms to address teacher shortages in hard-to-staff schools in Australia and other Anglosphere countries.

Organisational responses, initiatives, and mechanisms to address teacher shortages in hard-to-staff schools

Numerous stakeholders have led programmes that seek to address teacher shortages, with most led by governments and university Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes. Industry or philanthropic foundations have also taken some interest in teacher-related

issues and have supported some of these initiatives. Over many years, government initiatives have mostly taken shape through incentive schemes, which are generally structured around financial or other enticements, enhanced leadership opportunities, accelerated permanent employment status, extra leave/holidays, and/or subsidised accommodation. Teaching workforce planning at the government/departmental level is often dependent on sophisticated population projections that can be used to anticipate aggregate teacher demand many years in advance. However, the effort to address employment issues in hard-to-staff schools goes well beyond the scope of workforce supply and demand models based on forecasting current and future staffing needs in relation to projected population growth. The issues at play within hard-to-staff school contexts are complex, multifaceted, and often interact to magnify and multiply impact at various stages of the teacher shortage process.

University sectors have also produced a number of ITE initiatives or programmes designed to prepare and graduate teachers who are committed to teaching in challenging settings that they may be unfamiliar with, including culturally diverse settings, Indigenous communities, or regional towns, by facilitating understandings of social justice in an attempt to prepare often white, middle-class pre-service teachers for culturally, economically, and/or geographically diverse settings (Lampert et al., 2016). Over time, some of these ITE programmes have increasingly taken an employment focus, becoming involved in employment “match-making” (Burnett & Lampert, 2019) or offering employment-based ITE programmes.

Although some ITE initiatives have specifically targeted urban or metropolitan hard-to-staff schools, other work has addressed rural and remote settings where schools have experienced the most persistent long-term recruitment and retention issues, including problems with retaining high-quality school leaders suffering from stress, isolation, and burn-out. While some of the reasons for stress and attrition are the same across geographical locations, staff in remote locations in particular report the stress of having to be accountable to policies they feel are geared towards metropolitan schools. For example, some school leaders in remote settings in Australia appear to leave the profession over what they perceive as ethical or moral issues, such as when they feel they cannot meet the needs of Indigenous families because they must respond to policies that do not recognise the uniqueness of their context (Guenther & Osborne, 2020; Roberts, 2021). This example points to the broader fact that organisational responses to workforce shortages in hard-to-staff schools, including the initiatives programmes and mechanisms designed to address the problem, are setting out to address a highly context-specific, diverse, and multifaceted range of teachers, schools, and communities. In this section of the paper, we identify some of the specific mechanisms that are used to recruit, prepare, and retain staff in hard-to-staff schools in Australia and other Anglosphere countries, with a focus on some of the more influential programmes designed for ITE addressing recruitment and the issue of retention by addressing teacher wellbeing.

Alternative pathways into teaching

One key mechanism to address workforce shortages in hard-to-staff schools is bringing new, “high achieving” people into the teaching profession, including those seeking a change in career. One way this is achieved is by offering alternative pathways into the teaching profession instead of traditional or mainstream university-based ITE programmes. Such alternative pathways into teaching are more common in countries like

the UK, and generally have a greater school-based component such as teacher residencies and time spent in model teaching schools. Internationally, the high-profile Teach for All programme (which includes a number of partner organisations such as Teach for America) is a key example of alternative certification being used as a way to address teacher shortages in hard-to-staff schools (Ellis et al., 2016; Heineke et al., 2014). There has also been a rise, particularly in the US, of organisations and programmes focusing on bringing teachers from overseas (e.g., India and the Philippines) into hard-to-staff schools when domestic teachers cannot be recruited (Dunn, 2011). In Australia, a variety of teacher education initiatives are supported by the Australian Federal Government, including Teach for Australia, whose participants currently undertake an accredited degree with part of their programme taught through a contractually engaged university. The programme itself, however, is administered by a private corporation, and brands itself as a leadership programme rather than as teacher education.

International research suggests that alternative pathways are highly varied in terms of their success (Crawford-Garrett et al., 2021). Some alternate pathways are designed in ad-hoc ways dependent on the government of the day, yet can be effective if supported over a period of time, as observed in the employment-based Graduate Teacher Programme in England (Youens et al., 2018). Others, such as the New York City Teaching Fellows programme, and selective alternative teacher certification programmes aimed at high achieving graduates, have “not clearly benefited the students in hard-to-staff schools and likely do more harm than good” due to lack of contextual knowledge about the schools they enter and high rates of attrition (Brantlinger, 2020, p. 1097). Ultimately, although alternative pathways into teaching vary in type, quality, and impact, studies show that “the experiences and performances of teachers who entered through different pathways depended on the interaction of what teacher candidates brought with them, the features of programs and pathways as experienced, and the resources, leadership, and cultures of school contexts” (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2015, p. 16).

Targeted teacher education and university-school partnerships

Research indicates that learning strategies to prepare teachers for challenging school contexts specifically should be an important element in both the alternative pathways model described above and traditional university-based ITE programmes (Kirchhoff & Lawrenz, 2011). This is supported by a broader focus on effective ITE, which is central to Australia’s current Quality Initial Teacher Education Review (Department of Education, Skills and Employment [DESE], 2021). The focus on targeted teacher education reflects the documented way pre-service and early career teachers often feel ill-equipped for hard-to-staff contexts. One US study of 378 early career teachers (Kuriloff et al., 2019) clearly illustrates this, finding that 72% of teachers reported feeling unprepared to teach in urban classrooms and 62% reported the same in relation to culturally diverse classrooms. Following this, research shows that teachers who take up employment in hard-to-staff schools are most effective when they are well prepared by evidence-based training specific to diverse and/or high-needs settings, when they hold practical knowledge of the context of their students’ lives and are invested in their work (Bastian & Marks, 2017; Freedman & Appleman, 2009; Glasswell et al., 2016; Rowan et al., 2021; Williamson et al., 2016).

Targeted learning within ITE programmes includes specific university-based units of study within teaching degrees focusing on issues connected to hard-to-staff schools (for example, the “Teaching in Rural and Remote Locations” unit at the University of Tasmania) as well as broader initiatives such as the National Exceptional Teachers for Disadvantaged Schools programme, which prepares high-quality teachers for the disadvantaged school sector (Burnett & Lampert, 2016). It is important to note that specific programmes intended to attract teachers to hard-to-staff rural schools are also not uncommon in other countries including Canada (Corbett & Gereluk, 2020), England (Bagley & Hillyard, 2019), New Zealand (Grudnoff et al., 2019) and the United States (Gagnon, 2016).

In response to the underrepresentation of Indigenous teachers (see the MATSITI initiative for more information), Australia has developed and run longstanding ITE programmes like the RATEP, with the intention of preparing and attracting an Indigenous workforce. Similarly, various Indigenous Teacher Education Programs (ITEPS) have enacted efforts to attract First Nations teachers in Canada, the US, and New Zealand (Tessaro et al., 2021). The US in particular has a number of targeted university-based ITE programmes dedicated to preparing teachers for urban, multicultural schools, though these programmes vary in their degrees of success (Freedman & Appleman, 2009; Matsko & Hammerness, 2014; Tamir, 2010; Whipp, 2013). Frankenberg et al. (2010) outline one positive example of a US graduate programme for secondary teacher education dedicated to the preparation of urban teachers. They found that the vast majority of teachers who went through this programme started their careers in urban schools and tended to stay in these types of schools beyond the length of the study (three-year post-graduation).

There are three common elements to ITE programmes designed with teacher workforce needs in mind. All of them focus on i) attraction and recruitment into the profession, ii) preparation of quality teachers, and iii) teacher employment and retention. They also all purport the aim of building sustainable partnerships between universities and schools (Zugelder & Shelton, 2020). It is clear that teachers most likely to take up employment (and stay) are those who have spent prolonged periods of time in traditionally hard-to-staff settings, such as LSES urban schools, before they find themselves in front of a class (Perryman & Calvert, 2020). Dawson and Shand (2019) explain the importance of prolonged block placements or internships as a strategy to attract teachers to these schools. They believe the more familiar a teacher is with their setting the less likely they are to experience culture shock. For example, Cuervo and Acquaro (2018) found that a rural professional experience placement enhanced a positive view of working in these schools, which they argue needs to be complemented by efforts at urban universities to counter deficit perspectives on rural schools through their ITE programmes. It is important that these professional experiences move past reductive views of culture and context in relation to “diverse” or “high-need” student populations because poorly structured and supported placements can “perpetuate stereotypes and confirm rather than interrupt deficit thinking among PSTs” (Anderson & Stillman, 2013, p. 4).

There are many benefits to school-university partnerships but one issue that is regularly raised is the gap between enthusiastic graduate teachers who generally begin with high aspirations and the disillusionment that sometimes takes place when teachers begin their teaching careers. Although some reports lay responsibility on ITE programmes in terms of needing to better prepare their graduates to be realistic about what they will encounter (Green et al., 2018), others cast their eye on schools that have limited capacity

to transition, support, and induct new teachers in an effective way. These schools may appear to graduates as not demonstrating the best practice they learned at university and may not always seem to new teachers to be operating to best serve historically disadvantaged families and students (Kearney, 2021). Mentors and school leaders often express feeling discouraged when they are not empowered within their positions to make change within what they believe is a conservative institution (Rowlands et al., 2020). When school leaders and teachers are genuinely embedded in the communities in which they teach, the evidence is that they are more satisfied with their jobs, feel more committed to their students and families, and stay in the profession longer (Burton & Johnson, 2010; Ellis et al., 2016; Thomas et al., 2020). Additionally, when teacher education programmes directly consult community-based organisations and value community experts (students, parents, and residents) in high-needs areas, it helps create bidirectional partnerships as well as an “intentional pipeline of community-minded teachers committed to teach and stay in urban” and other hard-to-staff settings (Lee, 2018, p. 119). Broadly, there is some consensus on the value of contextualised ITE training and university-school partnerships as mechanisms for recruiting and retaining quality teachers, particularly through longer block placements or internships that familiarise and prepare future teachers for hard-to-staff schools.

Teacher retention and support of teacher wellbeing

In recent discussions, teacher wellbeing is receiving particular attention as linked to attrition, especially within high-poverty schools, which Curry and O’Brien (2012) refer to as a “wellness paradigm” (p. 180). This growing focus reflects the fact that the “persistent emotional labour” required in teaching “can make for a destructive situation” (Mawhinney & Rinke, 2018, p. 1084) related to teachers’ mental and physical health, feelings of safety, resilience, and personal and professional support systems. Decision-making autonomy (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011) is also identified as a factor that influences whether teachers stay in these settings, as are factors such as “resilience, reflection, and responsiveness” (Buchanan et al., 2013, p. 126), intrinsic motivation (Ashiedu & Scott-Ladd, 2012; Kelly & Fogarty, 2015), and teachers’ experiences of “success” with the students they teach. One study, for instance, found male teachers were more likely to leave the profession because of management practices that impacted on their sense of agency (Gallant & Riley, 2017). Additionally, Singh (2018) notes that teachers in hard-to-staff schools often experience stress and anxiety over their students’ performances on high-stakes tests, which is reflected in the popular book *Teacher: One Woman’s Struggle to Keep her Heart in Teaching* (Stroud, 2018). As in Smith and Ulvik’s (2017) findings, Stroud sees her decision to leave teaching as agentic (taking control over her own life) rather than as a sign of a lack of resilience. As managerial practices become an increasing part of teachers’ work, teachers feel their expertise, creativity, and decision-making power being reduced. This is making teaching a much less attractive profession, especially in LSES schools where teachers very often enter the profession with a sense of mission.

Day and Hong (2016) confirm that emotional resilience is more important for teachers in schools located in areas of socioeconomic disadvantage. In their study, resilience was most strongly demonstrated when teachers felt professionally and personally supported, forming strong relationships with colleagues based on common teacher identity and

enthusiasm for working in such challenging settings. While some studies confirm well-being as crucial to teacher retention (Robertson-Kraft & Duckworth, 2014), almost all studies recognise that teachers' capacity to network with and engage in healthy professional learning communities serves to mitigate some of the professional and emotional challenges associated with teaching as well as cultivate professional resiliency (Kelchtermans, 2017). However, it is important to recognise that these sorts of "resilience strategies" – advocating for themselves, students, and resources as well as cultivating allies and buffers – require significant energy, especially for novice teachers in challenging settings (Castro et al., 2010, p. 628). Thus, while often creating a better professional environment, these efforts do not come without a cost to individual educators.

Furthermore, specialised professional development can meet the wellbeing needs of teachers in hard-to-staff schools in a variety of useful ways, such as offering restorative justice training for teachers to become more able to handle trauma behaviours (Lawson et al., 2019) or opportunities to improve teachers' capacity in areas such as literacy and STEM (with the reward of becoming highly trained as a leader in the field). These are some of the "complex constellation of factors" related to teacher well-being that impact whether teachers can be retained in hard-to-staff schools (Freedman & Appleman, 2009, p. 333).

Work by McIntyre (2010) and Towers (2022) both identify commitment to high-poverty schools and communities as important to teachers who remain teaching in these contexts. McIntyre (2010) point to the unintended effects of government discourse meant to support teacher retention by emphasising career progression on long serving teachers who "sit still" in high poverty schools in the UK. Rather than focus on teacher attrition and the high levels of teacher turnover in schools serving disadvantaged communities, McIntyre instead concentrates on these teachers choosing to stay because of a "strong emotive relationship" (p. 601) with their schools and communities developed over long periods of time. More recently, addressing the scarcity of research on retention of Head Teachers working in disadvantaged contexts, Towers (2022) also identifies an overt commitment to the "stability and security" (p. 218) of the educational culture in high poverty schools due to the higher levels of leader turnover.

Limitations and directions for hard-to-staff initiatives

While there is clearly extensive research on why teachers enter and sometimes leave the profession, and on what appears to be "best practice," initiatives in Australia and other Anglosphere countries have tended to repeat strategies, with some variation, rather than examine what else could be done (Lampert et al., 2021). Looking more closely and collectively at the critiques of these initiatives might give some clues about what has worked, not worked and what has not yet been tried. In this final section we name some of those criticisms with the aim of suggesting new ways forward for a teaching workforce now claimed to be in "crisis."

A major issue appears to be the tendency to "reinvent" similar initiatives that are highly dependent on external funding. This lack of stable and sufficient funding is clearly a disruptive and limiting factor that impacts across a range of initiatives. Many of these initiatives are short term and limited in their ability to address the stressful working conditions that characterise many hard-to-staff schools such as

heavy workloads, toxic school culture, poor resources, low levels of administrative and collegial support, and a lack of leadership (Castro et al., 2010). Bastian and Marks (2017) study of North Carolina's "New Teacher Support Program," a university-based induction model for novice teachers targeted at low-performing schools, found the programme was successful in increasing retention of these teachers in these schools. However, they also note that the programme did not directly impact school culture, offer certain induction components, or always provide daily support (Bastian & Marks, 2017). In other words, some programmes make limited difference to teacher retention because the programmes fail to make the systemic changes to the actual reasons teachers often leave the profession.

There also would appear to be several identified patterns in the empirical research literature around hard-to-staff school initiatives. In their review of 54 primarily empirical articles on student teaching placements aimed at developing future teachers for urban and/or high-needs schools, Anderson and Stillman (2013) found several issues around the limitations of these efforts. Their review identified a disproportionate emphasis on belief and attitude change as the goal of these professional experiences, as opposed to the impacts of these changes on learning or future behaviours which, they argued, created a greater emphasis on the documenting of dispositions rather than on the impacts of these changes on teaching practices and career trajectories. Anderson and Stillman's (2013, pp. 34–35) literature review also revealed that there was often less interrogation of the way negative attitudes and beliefs about urban, high-needs school remained unchallenged or were reinforced during student teaching placements. They argue this focus on beliefs and attitudes, through the lens of concepts such as "cultural mismatch" and "cultural competency," often centres the experiences of "normative" pre-service teachers (white, middle class) and problematically implies that those outside this norm "inherently possess requisite dispositions and capacities" (Anderson & Stillman, 2013, p. 34). This connects to a broader issue identified in the literature around the reductive way culture, context, and diversity are conceptualised, which in consequence affects the schools serving highly diverse populations.

Despite research on the multifaceted reasons for what the Australian Council of Deans of Education called "teacher exodus" (Aspland, 2016) and others refer to as "the revolving door" (Ingersoll, 2001), teacher burn-out (Rajendran et al., 2020), and teacher plateau (Meister & Ahrends, 2011), there remains a diversity of views and strategies on how to best address the issue. The wide range of organisational responses and mechanisms in place to address teacher shortages in hard-to-staff schools reflects the difficult, persistent nature and, considering recent teacher strikes, the urgency of the issues at hand.

While governments and other institutions in Australia and other Anglosphere countries have shown a commitment to a range of responses to improve teacher recruitment and retention, these appear to have made little significant, systemic difference. The reasons why teachers leave the profession, especially in hard-to-staff schools, are far more complex and under-problematised than commonly believed (Gallant & Riley, 2014). One thing, however, is abundantly clear. The issues of preparing, recruiting, and retaining an effective teaching workforce for hard-to-staff schools are ongoing, and many would argue increasing, especially in a current climate of poor working conditions and extreme uncertainty.

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