

INFORMED SOURCES, NO. 17

19 OCTOBER 2020

IMPORTANT FOR EARLY CAREER TEACHERS TO RECEIVE TIME AND SUPPORT TO DEVELOP CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT SKILLS AND CONFIDENCE

Classroom management is vital to an effective learning environment for students, and just as vital for teachers' mental health and wellbeing. How teachers manage student misbehaviour relies on their sense of professional competence (known as teacher self-efficacy) at the outset of their career. Excessive demands can derail this sense of competence with enduring consequences even many years later.



Recent research by Professor Rebecca Lazarides, Professor Helen Watt, and Professor Paul Richardson (from Potsdam University, The University of Sydney, and Monash University) has found that teachers' self-efficacy was very stable from completing teacher education even up until 15 years of teaching experience.

"Our findings suggest that classroom management self-efficacy had already become established during teacher

education," the researchers write. "This is when future teachers begin their practical experiences with students in classrooms."

The study surveyed 395 Australian school teachers from when they began their teacher education, until up to 15 years of teaching experience, as part of Helen Watt and Paul Richardson's continuing FIT-Choice study: www.fitchoice.org.

The finding that the stability of teachers' self-efficacy was not affected by how long they had taught suggests that by early career, teachers have already established classroom management behaviours and developed habits. Initial strategies for responding to student misbehaviour (i.e., clear structures vs. negativity) persisted into mid-career, seemingly setting in train a pattern of interaction.

It has often been assumed that higher self-efficacy leads to more effective classroom teaching, but previous studies were not conducted with repeated measurements across a sufficiently long timeframe to really determine whether this was the case. This study provided strong evidence that beginning teachers' initial level of self-efficacy at the end of their teacher education predicted more effective reported classroom management strategies during early career.

Self-efficacy for classroom management during early career also predicted better classroom management strategies by mid-career – but importantly, only when beginning teachers were not overloaded by excessive demands.

Excessive demands during early career also disrupted teachers' effective classroom management strategies to the point where those who were using effective strategies during early career were less likely to continue them into mid-career.

"Findings signal the need for school practice to reduce excessive demands in order to enable teachers to develop more adaptive teaching styles and mitigate against the stressors of teaching, especially during early career."

If beginning teachers develop maladaptive means of managing student misbehaviour, it is difficult for them to alter their practice and find more effective ways of doing so later. It is vital that schools support early-career teachers in developing these skills, the paper says.

The researchers suggest assisting student teachers and early career teachers to reflect on the challenges they face in classroom management, especially the role of negative emotions such as anxiety and anger which can be triggered by classroom interactions. They suggest helping teachers expand their repertoire of behaviour management strategies, as well as alternatives to dysfunctional emotional self-regulation techniques such as suppression, with more effective approaches like reappraisal.

"Early experiences showed enduring importance for teachers' professional development," the paper says. "A reduced allocation of workload, assistance with meeting initial professional registration requirements and quality mentoring programs would likely help them cope with the initial overload of demands they experience."

This is tied to available resources for teachers, which the researchers recognise as an important issue. "Contextual resources", those that form the circumstances of their teaching, were seen as particularly important. These include the quality of the school climate, and their relationships with colleagues and mentors.

This is in contrast to excessive demands. There is evidence that time pressure demands have the strongest negative effects on teacher wellbeing.

Giving teachers the space and time to develop their professional skills is not only beneficial for them; more harmonious classroom environments will help students learn, improve academic outcomes, and contribute to schools' overall success.

For more information, see

Rebecca Lazarides, Helen Watt & Paul Richardson (2020). 'Teachers' classroom management self-efficacy, perceived classroom management and teaching contexts from beginning until mid-career'. *Learning and Instruction*, 69, 101346.

We thank all of our supporters, especially our platinum supporters



Government of South Australia
Department for Education

You can find a full list of MCERA's supporters [here](#). To find out more about supporting our organisation, contact info@mcera.org.au

