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## **Fish Out Of Water: Investigating The Readiness And Proficiency Of Beginning Drama Teachers In Western Australian Secondary Schools.**

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*Abstract: The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2011) stipulate that graduating teachers need to be classroom-ready and able to perform at a 'graduate standard'. However, recent research indicates that nearly 50% of beginning teachers lack readiness, are overwhelmed with stress, and will leave the profession within five years. This paper seeks to elucidate this disconcerting reality by providing a nuanced focus on the experiences of beginning drama teachers. Findings indicate that while participants in this study began feeling confident and ready for teaching drama; they were largely unprepared for the unwritten requirements of the profession – namely, coping with systems, policies and bureaucracy - and extensive extracurricular responsibilities. This article posits several strategies for enabling beginning drama teachers to successfully 'manage' their induction into the profession, and ultimately achieve teacher identity salience.*

### **Introduction**

*"I felt ready for teaching drama but not all the other stuff. I feel like a fish out of water. It's mainly the admin and all the policies and political stuff that makes me feels like this." (Jack, beginning drama teacher)*

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2011) provides a summary of the responsibilities of a classroom teacher. These are organised into four career stages from graduate, to proficient, to highly accomplished, to lead teacher. Teacher graduates, having completed their pre-service education, must be able to perform at a graduate standard across the seven standards: 1) Know students and how they learn; 2) Know the content and how to teach it; 3) Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning; 4) Create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments; 5) Assess, provide feedback and report on student learning; 6) Engage in professional learning; and, 7) Engage professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community. While it is 'expected' that beginning teachers are classroom-ready and have sufficient practical skills when graduating from pre-service education (Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group, 2014), just how well they are prepared to manage the inherent challenges of teaching has attracted some debate (Anderson, 2002, 2003; McKenzie, Weldon, Rowley, Murphy, & McMillan, 2013; Pendergast, Garvis & Keogh, 2011).

The Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (2014), identified that the induction of beginning teachers into the profession was problematic and that many lacked

necessary practical skills and classroom readiness. This lack of readiness for teaching has implications for schools such as lower student outcomes and teacher attrition (Macdonald, 1999; Martin, Sass & Schmitt, 2011). Indeed, in the US alone, two billion dollars is spent annually replacing teachers who resign (Clandinin et al., 2015).

Given the economic imperatives resulting from teacher attrition and the well-recognised deleterious impacts on student achievement, there has been considerable research examining the challenges of early-career teachers (Day, 2008; Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Farrell, 2003; Le Cornu, 2013; Papatraianou & Le Cornu, 2014). Likewise, significant investigation has gone into researching ways to support and retain early career teachers (Hong, 2012; Kinman, Wray, & Strange, 2011; Le Cornu, 2013). Studies have found that providing opportunities for open communication and feedback (Hong et al., 2018, Le Maistre & Pare, 2010), strong support from colleagues and leadership (Day & Gu, 2010; Hong et al., 2018; Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008) and a school culture with a shared vision and commitment from leadership (Hong et al., 2018) are effective means of supporting beginning teachers.

Yet despite the attention this has received from researchers, schools and sectors, it is of grave concern that up to 50% of these teachers are likely to leave the profession in their first five years (Galant & Riley, 2014; Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006; Le Cornu, 2013). This is largely due to issues of workload, lack of support (AITSL, 2016) and burnout – defined as emotional exhaustion and lack of a sense of personal accomplishment and disengagement (Lauermaann & König, 2016; Pyhältö et al., 2011).

Of particular concern to us, as drama teacher educators and researchers, is the lack of attention in the research literature placed on the qualitative experiences of beginning drama teachers and the ways in which they manage additional and often extensive extra-curricular workloads. This project responds to this deficit by providing a nuanced focus on the perceptions of beginning drama teachers and how they construct their teacher identities. Through focus-group interviews with 15 drama teachers currently working in Western Australian schools, we set out to understand the factors most conducive to supporting both their induction to and retention in the profession. Understanding these factors is essential, given the prevalence of stress in the lives of Arts teachers (2002, 2003; Ballantyne, 2006, 2007; Donelan, 1989; Faust, 1995; Haseman, 1990; Kelly, 1999; Wales, 1999).

## **Key Ideas and the Conceptual Terrain**

### **Early Career Teachers**

Teachers progress through a number of phases throughout their career trajectories (Day & Gu, 2007; Huberman, 1989; Meister & Ahrens, 2011). Seminal research conducted by Huberman (1989, 1993) identified five distinct phases across the life-cycle of one's teaching career: 1) Survival and discovery (1-2 years of teaching), 2) Stabilization (4-6 years of teaching), 3) Experimentation (7-25 years of teaching), 4) Serenity and/or Conservatism (26-33 years of teaching), and 5) Disengagement (34 years +). Huberman labelled the beginning teacher's career entry phase, 'survival and discovery' (1989). Survival refers to the transition shock, complexity and uncertainty of the classroom. This typically occurs parallel with discovery - the enthusiasm of a beginning teacher and sense of pride in having one's own classroom (Huberman, 1989). Whilst many professions refer to this career stage as a phase of exploration, Huberman (1989) argues that the constraints of classroom-life mean there are limited opportunities for beginning teachers to 'explore'. Their contact with peers, other colleagues and institutions are inhibited by the day-to-day demands of classroom life.

This phase is well-researched, partly due to the high attrition rate of early career teachers (ECTs) from the profession (Day, 2008; Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Farrell, 2003; Fransson & Frelin, 2016; Hong, 2012; Le Cornu, 2013; Papatraianou & Le Cornu, 2014).

Day and Gu (2007) established a more nuanced understanding of the phases of teaching by investigating factors contributing to teachers' effectiveness at different periods of their professional lives. Their study explored the mediating impact of situated, professional and personal events as key influences on teacher effectiveness over the course of their professional lives. As a consequence of this holistic approach to their research, they identified sub-groups within each of the phases identified by Huberman. While Huberman categorised the first stage as 'survival and discovery', Day and Gu identified two distinct sub-groups of teachers: 1) teachers with a developing sense of self-efficacy, and 2) teachers with a reduced sense of efficacy (Day & Gu, 2007). Self-efficacy is a person's belief about her ability to exercise control over her own functioning and over events that affect her life (Bandura, 1994). Importantly, support from senior staff, positive feedback from colleagues and a sound school culture were identified as playing a key role in facilitating this sense of self-efficacy. Indeed, a lack of self-efficacy has been identified as a contributing factor in teacher attrition (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Researchers have called for systems to build beginning teachers' self-efficacy and professional identity, in order to promote and retain committed and enthusiastic teachers.

One such strategy conducive to building teachers' self-efficacy is through 'task appreciation'. Task appreciation incorporates the belief or view that someone acknowledges the efforts of one's professional performance and articulates gratitude for the work that has been completed (Papatraianou & Le Cornu, 2014). For a beginning teacher, 'task appreciation' can come from the leadership team, from colleagues or students and is integral to teacher wellbeing (Day & Gu, 2007). A further strategy is that of 'reality confirmation', a provision made by others that reinforces the individual's perception of the world. Essentially, it is a means by which others can support an individual's adaptive defence mechanisms (Malone et al., 2013; Papatraianou & Le Cornu, 2014). For early career teachers, this is typically provided by peers who are also in the early professional life phase.

### **Confidently Managing or Just Coping**

It is not in the best interests of schools and, perhaps more pertinently, students to have teachers who lack self-efficacy and are 'just coping' in the classroom. Instead, schools require teachers who have strong professional identities, who teach at their best, and who can flourish and thrive by managing challenges and moving forward (Hong et al., 2018). A teacher's professional identity is a key factor in sustaining motivation and commitment (Day et al., 2006; Hong, 2010). In the early years of teaching, these professional identities, "are provisional and likely to be challenged and changed as teachers are exposed to the tensions that are an inherent part of changing classroom dynamics, school environments and policy demands" (Hong et al., 2018, p. 250). The value of having an experienced teacher to mentor a beginning teacher through complex school policies and the uncertainties of the classroom is obvious (Hong, Day & Greene, 2018). However, experienced teachers lack the time to take on this additional workload and responsibility (McKinnon, 2016). Without adequate support and under pressure to navigate complex tensions each day, beginning teachers resort to coping strategies, hoping that the situation will gradually improve.

Teachers face tensions and challenges daily and are compelled to act instinctively, without the time to consider the consequences. Hong et al, (2018) refer to this as 'decisional capacity,' that is, a teacher's capacity and competence to make sound decisions amidst

uncertain and complex situations. Decisional capacity is not something developed through reading text-books; rather, it is acquired through experience and reflection. Garvis and Pendergast (2010) identified that assistance from colleagues who offered advice, shared resources, ideas and teaching strategies was integral to supporting beginning teachers develop decisional capacity. The extent to which they succeed in ‘managing’, rather than ‘coping’, is largely dependent on the direct practical and emotional support they receive from colleagues and indirect support through school culture.

Coping can be defined as “constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 141). Coping is typically viewed as a process because it involves change over time or across situations (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987). Hong et al. (2018) describe coping as a reactive response, enabling teachers to survive in the shorter term but without resolving challenges. They state:

When teachers lose their power to act, influence their own work and make effective decisions, their weak sense of agency, which is often coupled with low confidence, is likely to impact negatively on their professional learning and hinders them from actively participating to resolve challenges (Hong et al., 2018, p. 252).

Teachers who ‘cope’ with challenges, tolerate the intensity and complexity of demands and expectations at a cost to their motivational and emotional energy. Whereas, beginning teachers who were able to ‘manage’ complex and onerous demands were able to do so through the efficacy of the school-level support they experienced (Hong et al., 2018). Teachers who can manage, overcome or resolve challenges do so by manipulating them to their advantage, thereby increasing self-efficacy. This has ongoing benefits as it enables teachers to build capacity, aspire to new goals and implement effective strategies.

A concerning reality for beginning drama teachers is that many struggle to manage the demands and complexities of the profession (e.g. Anderson, 2002, 2003). For example, drama teachers are often ‘expected’ to facilitate considerable extra-curricular activities such as school productions, concerts and various performing arts competitions (Gray & Lowe, 2019; Gray, Wright & Pascoe, 2017). These tasks are time-intensive (Norris et al., 2000; Wales, 1999), stressful, and can lead to burnout (Ballantyne, 2006, 2007; Donelan, 1989; Faust, 1995; Haseman, 1990; Kelly, 1999; Wales, 1999). In most cases, these expectations are in addition to the teachers’ regular loads (Ballantyne, 2007; Gray & Lowe, 2019; Kelly, 1999). It is recognised that even the most experienced drama teacher can find managing the extra-curricular load challenging (Anderson, 2002; 2003; Gray, 2016).

Another challenge for beginning drama teachers is that drama education can be viewed as a subject without rigour (Anderson & Donelan, 2009; Lambert, Wright, Currie and Pascoe, 2015) often attracting students who do not want to engage in the learning and/or are looking for an easy option. Furthermore, drama education, like other ‘non-core’ subjects, often finds itself having to fight for a place on the school timetable. In the United Kingdom, Drama has been subsumed into the English curriculum, losing its place as a subject in its own right (Pitfield, 2013). Additionally, beginning teachers are under-resourced in Arts subjects, and receive less support when compared to their English and mathematics colleagues (Garvis & Pendergast, 2010). This has been attributed to the detrimental impact high stakes testing has had on arts subjects as it narrows the educational field to literacy and numeracy (Lambert, Wright, Currie & Pascoe, 2015; Thompson & Cook, 2014). Moreover, the lack of support and encouragement from school and administration staff has repercussions for teacher self-efficacy.

Smith and Ingerson (2004) assert that the ‘best and brightest’ of beginning teachers are the ones most likely to leave the profession. This is particularly concerning for us, as teacher educators, given that many of the participants in this study were high ranking

graduates, gaining outstanding results for their studies and practicums. Therefore, it is imperative that we question the taken-for-granted assumptions of classroom readiness theory (van Manen, 2014), to gain a deeper understanding of how beginning drama teachers can be supported to *manage*, rather than merely *cope* in the early phase of their careers.

## Methodology

Framing this research is a commitment to critical constructivism. The ontological assumption underpinning a constructivist epistemology is that reality can be defined in terms of the meaning that is created from experiences within a specific context (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), or as Crotty (1998) suggests, “meaning is not discovered but constructed” (p. 42). It is important given the focus of our investigation – the human experience of beginning teaching – that we adopt an alternative stance to the positivist paradigm. Guba and Lincoln (1989) proposed that the “constructivist paradigm provides the best ‘fit’ whenever it is human inquiry that is being considered” (p. 82). Critical theory adds to this paradigm because it problematises the taken-for-granted-ness of assemblages of power, both embodied and discursive and cultural hegemony. Power is developed through dominant discourses and performative assemblages and processes; thus a critical constructivist approach allows researchers to examine and critique the relational, discursive and embodied intersection between beginning drama teachers, schools, peers, students and AITSL standards.

This research focuses on beginning drama teachers’ induction into the profession. In order to learn about these experiences, qualitative focus-group interviews were conducted with 15 participants to give voice to their experiences and perspectives on beginning teaching. The first focus-group comprised four participants (one male, three females) with one to two years teaching experience; the second focus-group comprised four participants (one male, three females) with six to eighteen months teaching experience; the third focus group comprised four participants (all female) with six months to four years teaching experience and the final focus-group comprised three participants (one male, two females) with two to three years teaching experience.

Semi-structured interviews focused on the participants’ experiences of beginning teaching. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, then analysed following the analytic procedures described by Miles and Huberman (1994). Researchers assigned pseudonyms to each participant to protect their identities and then interrogated the data for key concepts, themes and descriptors. These were then grouped to form categories, and this process was repeated for the remaining focus-group interviews. This analysis assisted in identifying emerging themes.

## Findings

Three themes emerged from the focus-group data: 1) confidently managing teaching drama; 2) coping with systems, policies and bureaucracy; and, 3) managing professional learning (just).

### Theme 1 - Confidently Managing Teaching Drama

Consistent across the data from each focus-group was the confidence participants felt in their readiness and proficiency for effectively teaching drama. For these beginning

teachers, their passion for drama education and making a difference to the lives of young people underscored their work, which in turn, enhanced their satisfaction and self-efficacy. It was evident that all participants ran extra-curricular activities for their students to extend student engagement. These activities were in addition to their regular teaching load and they received no financial remuneration or time-in-lieu.

Participants discussed the enjoyment of getting to know their students and understanding the ways in which their students learn (AITSL Standard 1). Angela amplifies this theme: “The students have been my highlight. I’ve worked hard to get them engaged and we’ve got some good banter”. For Elle, her extra-curricular drama club was a way to get to know her students, develop relationships and build the skills they would need to participate in the school musical:

We hold a drama club every Thursday afternoon. It’s really to gauge what the students like doing and what areas they need to strengthen. As we’re coming towards the musical, we’re teaching the sorts of skills the students will need like stage combat, vocal communication and stage make-up.

Participants also discussed their confidence with content and the pedagogy that was most conducive to engaging students in their learning (AITSL Standard 2). They believed their pre-service education had especially prepared them for the content and curriculum requirements of teaching drama. Angela reported:

All the drama content we learnt at university was so helpful. I haven’t been panicked about what to teach because my content is good. I have good curriculum knowledge and so I was confident with understanding how to align curriculum with my programming.

Participants believed they were able to create engaging programs that challenged their students and were enjoyable to teach (AITSL Standard 3). These programs came about from an increased understanding of how best to engage their students in the learning. This made a welcome change from practicum experiences where they were often programming for students they did not know. Stella amplifies this theme:

I have so many mixed abilities and kids with different challenges in my classes. I’ve loved getting to know these kids and implementing strategies that can help and challenge them. These are my students and I’m able to plan programs that I want to teach and that my students enjoy. As opposed to being on prac [practicum] where you have to do what the mentor wants.

Participants in all four focus-groups described their proficiency in creating and maintaining supportive learning environments for their students where they felt safe to take risks (AITSL Standard 4). For most participants, it was the extra-curricular activities that provided them with a means to connect relationally with their students and help them realise their potential. Participants gained considerable satisfaction with this aspect of their work that was frequently attributed to the appreciation shown by students for their efforts. Jack explained:

I’ve enjoyed building relationships with students. I really value all the positive feedback from the kids about how I’m going and it’s good to know that I’ve made the right choice in becoming a teacher. When we finished the musical, the students did a little slide show to show their appreciation of the teachers involved. When my picture flashed up, all the kids cheered and they appreciated the time I’d put in for the production.

It is evident that appreciation shown by students was highly valued by the beginning teachers as it reinforced they were successful practitioners and were making a difference to their students. Elle described:

They hadn't had a drama club in a couple of years and starting it up with Angela and having 40 kids sign up from day one was amazing. One kid said, "That was so much fun, and I can't wait for the next one." Those moments when you don't expect it, but you see how much you've made a difference and they appreciate it.

Participants felt largely proficient in making accurate judgements and providing feedback to enhance student learning (AITSL Standard 5). Some participants described feedback they had received from colleagues and parents regarding the progress students had made as a result of their teaching. The acknowledgement of this success, and participants' personal understanding of their proficiency, both reassured and encouraged these beginning drama teachers to keep working hard. Nat explained:

Kids that were just getting bored or not achieving last year and seeing their engagement has been great. It's been tough trying to juggle all the different levels of achievement in my classes but I've implemented some study sessions for kids that have made a real difference. When one boy got his test back and he passed for the first time all year – you should have seen his face. Even though they don't always say thank you – but to see their grades improve or to see them understanding what I'm teaching is really great.

However, while participants were confident in their abilities to manage AITSL Standards 1-5, they were time-poor and in most cases under pressure and stress from managing onerous workloads – including extensive extra-curricular projects. Angela described her involvement in a school production:

The production was full-on. We were there after school and evenings on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and all day on Saturdays. We started week one and the production was week nine, which made it an intensive short process to put the show on. It was very stressful. We were all there to 10pm each night with rehearsals. I was Production Assistant and was mainly in charge of props and backstage work.

Jack, also a young father with parental duties, described his extra-curricular activities:

Last term we had our school production which was huge. This term, I've run a Monday afternoon drama club. We have an Arts Spectacular coming up which I'm choreographing and developing some drama performances for. We have a valedictory performance. I have two productions that I'll do with year 9 and year 10. Some of these performances I had no clue about and someone has come to me and said, "What have you done about this?" And I've said, "What?" I didn't even know about it. I do all of this outside my regular teaching load.

The experiences of these participants elucidate their readiness for teaching drama and the quality work they are doing in their schools. It also highlights the challenge for these young teachers to manage an extensive extra-curricular load which goes above and beyond the expectations of other teachers in their schools. Without consideration of their workload, the concerning reality for these beginning teachers is the risk of burn-out and prematurely leaving the profession.

## **Theme 2 – Coping with Systems, Policies and Bureaucracy**

While participants' readiness for teaching drama was evident, they lacked confidence in their ability to manage the systems, policies and bureaucracy (AITSL Standard 7). This is perhaps largely due to being sheltered from the vast majority of systems, policies and bureaucracy during practicum. Elle explained, "Pre-service training taught us pedagogy and content but it's all the other admin stuff. Also, managing personalities and different expectations of schools. That wasn't dealt with at all at uni or prac [practicum]." It was this



inability to manage systemic requirements and navigate staffroom politics that prompted Jack to state, “I felt ready for teaching drama but not all the other stuff. I feel like a fish out of water. It’s mainly the admin and all the policies and political stuff that makes me feels like this.”

Overwhelmingly, participants shared their struggles with, “...the unwritten requirements of teaching” (Pam, beginning teacher) and their lack of confidence to comply with legislative, administrative and organisation requirements. While participants ‘engaged’ with their colleagues, parents/carers and the community, they described feeling underprepared and out of their depth. This was frustrating for participants and they described being expected to ‘know’ certain processes. It was evident that participants particularly found administrative information technology platforms such as SEQTA time consuming and challenging. Elle explained, “It was a huge shock, especially SEQTA. When I started here, I was trying to learn kids’ names, teach classes and cope with SEQTA.”

The beginning teachers also drew attention to the quantity of time-consuming emails requiring action each day. Whilst they understood that this was a necessary part of the profession, they were overwhelmed by the sheer number of administrative tasks. Moreover, they found this drew them away from more important aspects of their job, namely teaching and working with their students. Angela exemplifies this conception:

The admin is just so overwhelming and I get swamped with emails. I need to be organised to keep on top of it so I write lists to help. But then I worry about that list at home. There’s always things popping up and it becomes impossible to ever get through the list. I spend time wading through emails when I want to be planning great lessons and out in the yard spending time with the kids. Unfortunately I don’t have any leadership support either.

The lack of leadership support in enabling teachers to cope with systems, policies and bureaucracies was a common theme raised by participants in focus-groups. Whilst leadership implemented some formal processes to ‘support’ beginning teachers, participants believed these processes were ineffective and did not provide them with quality support. Jack explained:

In theory, I get support from leadership. There’s an early career professional development program where once a fortnight all the early career teachers get together and do a PD session. We do a one on one with the head of PD and she’ll come and observe two lessons a semester and give feedback. It’s good in theory because you get some support and feedback. My observations went well and that reinforced that I’m doing the right thing but on the flip side it added more pressure when I didn’t need it.

Angela similarly described a program at her school that was ostensibly aimed at nurturing new teachers; yet the reality was quite different:

You’d go to the meeting and instead of checking in with everyone, we were told we were getting two reviews of our teaching. We also had student surveys that the kids completed about how we were going. Just for new teachers. It was about ticking off the boxes rather than checking in with how everyone was going. It was so much extra pressure. The intention’s there but the reality is more pressure.

Fortunately for Kristy, the support she gained from fellow graduate teachers enabled her to see that she was not alone and that others were similarly struggling with this aspect of the profession. She stated, “I have other graduate teachers at school. It’s good to share stories and experiences with them to know I’m not alone. Others feel this way too. It’s good to have that support network for my mental wellbeing.” Nat described how a more experienced colleague mentored her through managing the quantity of emails and administrative tasks she found particularly challenging. Nat said, “She [colleague] has personally taken on a

mentoring role for me. It's not a formal thing but she wants to make sure I'm okay and if I'm okay, then this will help the kids." While only three participants described receiving mentoring from colleagues, it was evident that the help and support they provided was integral to their survival. As Alicia notes:

The person I replaced – who moved to a school nearby – has been really supportive of me, more than any of the school staff. She's really guided me through the programs that I've been working on and is happy to answer any questions. We chat on the phone, we go to plays together. She's gone beyond anything I could have asked for. It's really helpful and I don't know if I would have survived without her support.

The support Alicia received from the wider drama teaching network was essential to her continued professional growth. Considering the difficulties these beginning drama teachers have experienced managing the systems, policies and bureaucracy, this support is vital to their sense of self-efficacy.

Given the considerable energy expended in teaching and managing the extra-curricular work, it is understandable that for these beginning drama teachers, the focus on their own professional learning had taken a back seat.

### **Theme 3 – Managing Professional Learning (Just)**

Participants were aware of the need to develop professionally in their first few years of teaching. They described the need to pursue opportunities for professional development (PD) in order to improve their practice and move to the next AITSL career stage, 'Highly Accomplished'. However, the reality for these beginning drama teachers was that they lacked time to engage in additional professional development. As Elle stated, "There's just not enough time, trying to keep up with everything to then go and do professional learning. I want to learn and develop my craft but there's just not enough hours in the day". Other participants spoke about the lack of quality professional development for their career stage which resulted in them feeling frustrated with the imposition on their time. Jack explained, "We have mandatory PD. We've done five so far and only one has been good. The others have been forced on us and a waste of time." Furthermore, participants did not believe that the leadership team helped them manage their professional learning. Instead, participants felt they were left largely alone to work things out for themselves or were provided with ineffective feedback. Nat described seeking help from her Head of Department (HOD):

I asked her [HOD] to come to my most challenging English class because I needed help with the kids – how I could reach them more. All she did was write what I did but not what I could do better. It just wasn't useful at all.

The lack of targeted professional development for beginning teachers was deemed problematic by all participants. Lynda suggested learning ways to manage administration and coping with the high quantity of emails each day would be the kind of, "helpful and realistic PD that would actually make a difference." Sofia agreed with this sentiment adding, "Even time to discuss our feelings, insecurities and ask questions of more experienced colleagues would be helpful."

Identity confusion was widely discussed by participants, particularly their struggle to feel confident with their teacher identities. Recent research into teacher identity theory suggests that teaching is not merely a skill but a complex and often intangible set of personal, social, embedded processes and practices that concern the whole person (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Olsen, 2012). Teachers continually reconstruct their view of themselves in relation to their peers, workplaces, professional activities and cultural contexts. Recent

research has shown that teacher identity is not static but rather a dynamic becoming, evolving in relation to discourses, assemblages and relationships (e.g. Flores & Day, 2006; Rodgers & Scott, 2008). Teacher identities are also multifaceted (Cooper & Olson, 1996; Gee, 2001). In identity theory *identity salience* is the degree to which one's self-concept is in confluence with one's role – identities that are higher on the salience hierarchy are more likely to be enacted (Morris, 2013). Thus, the corresponding degree to which teachers invest 'importance' into their role ultimately correlates with the successful performance of that role. The salience with which teachers connect their role with their sense of self will determine how much effort they put into the role and ultimately how well they perform in it. If teachers fail to achieve salience with the role for whatever reason, then they will invest little effort, inspiration or energy into teaching.

Relationality is significant to identity theory because identity salience is predicated on the 'intensiveness' of the emotional connections "within a given social network and the importance of others to whom one relates" (Morris, 2013, p. 24). Participants in this study described feeling inadequate and, at times, like they did not belong. Elle exemplified this lack of identity salience when she said, "Sometimes, I think that I'm just too young to be in a position where I tell other people what to do and I get that vibe from other teachers too." Melissa added, "I've actually been told off by teachers thinking I was a student. I was told to tie my hair up. This made me feel nervous that people weren't taking me seriously."

Interestingly, participants noted a difference between 'feeling' ready to progress to the next level and 'being' ready. In other words, while they believed they had ample evidence in their portfolio depicting their achievements and proficiency across AITSL standards; whether they 'felt' like they were proficient was a different story. Angela encapsulated this notion when she explained, "Our school is proactive in getting us to the next level. They will provide the steps to get us there, however, whether we feel 'proficient' is another thing." Jack elaborated on Angela's comments by emphasising the importance of 'feeling' like a proficient teacher and not just going through the motions to satisfy requirements:

That's the keyword there – feeling like a proficient teacher. We need to feel like we're a proficient teacher not just tick the standards off. That's the fish out of water feeling – I'm still feeling insecure and unsure if I'm doing the right thing.

Teacher identities are crafted within various social structures, and 'feeling like a proficient teacher' (or teacher identity salience) requires support and nurturing within those structures. From a post-structuralist theoretical lens, drawing on Foucault (1977), Butler (2006) and Deleuze and Guattari, it is important to note that the concept of teacher identity needs to be understood as contextual, discursive and performed. Thus, teacher identity can be understood as embodied, fragmented, multi-faceted, and contingent (de Freitas, 2008), performative (Butler, 2006), and evolving in various, often conflicting discourses (Lutovac & Kaasila, 2018). Walshaw (2013) notes that these educational discourses function as unwritten rules, "sketching out ways of being in the world, defining the possibilities, as well as the limits, of meaningful existence" (p. 102). Educational discourses create and locate ECTs in their identities, which are then performed to varying degrees of success. Hence, discourses have the power to prescribe one's identity and invite further processing, such as positioning, categorisation, negotiation and normalisation (de Freitas, 2008; Skog & Anderson, 2015; Walshaw, 2013). For the beginning drama teachers, the ability to achieve salience with one's *performed* teacher identity depends on the support and encouragement one's performance receives.

## Discussion

Investigating the beginning teaching experiences of these participants has elucidated the various ways they navigate the 'survival and discovery' phase of their teaching career (Huberman, 1989). These drama teachers are discovering various means by which they can engage their students. Furthermore, they are recognising their aptitude for forming strong relationships. In doing so they are making a positive contribution to teaching and learning programs as well as the wider-school community through their extra-curricular commitments. The experiences of these participants demonstrates their readiness for teaching drama, the quality work they are doing in schools and the effectiveness of their pre-service education in preparing them for this component of their work (AITSL Standards 1-5).

However, it also became evident that these beginning drama teachers were merely 'surviving' in several key components of teaching, namely coping with systems, policies and bureaucracy, rather than achieving identity salience with the teaching role. It was these aspects of the profession that were taking a considerable toll on their self-efficacy, and their ability to remain positive and focused on teaching. Of particular concern, is that some participants questioned their ability to sustain their enthusiasm for teaching given their extensive workload and considerable extra-curricular responsibilities with little support from the school's leadership team. The problem of burn-out is a reality for these participants and it is no wonder, that in this current educational climate of heightened accountability, that these early years of teaching can be a battle for survival (Bezzina, 2006).

While prior research has identified the need for a more effective induction of drama teachers entering the profession (Anderson, 2002; 2003; Ballantyne, 2006; 2007; Pascoe & Sallis, 2012; Warren, 1992) the experiences of these participants reveal that their beginning years of teaching are fraught with challenges. Thus, in considering the experiences of beginning drama teachers and better supporting their induction into the profession, a number of factors need to be considered.

First, a strong professional support network for beginning drama teachers is integral to their induction, self-efficacy and professional development. The importance of a solid network and mentoring is acknowledged in the literature (Day & Gu, 2010; Hong et al., 2018; Vescio, Ross & Adams, 2008) yet as this research has shown, only three participants had experienced any form of mentoring. A network comprising graduate teachers also experiencing similar challenges (Malone et al., 2013; Papatraianou & Le Cornu, 2014), as well as more experienced drama teacher-mentors to guide early career teachers through challenging decision making seems ideal (Garvis & Pendergast, 2010; Hong et al., 2018). This is perhaps where professional associations need to adopt and formalise mentoring processes to ensure beginning teachers do not fall through the cracks.

Despite research highlighting the integral role leadership plays in the efficacy and development of beginning teachers (Gronn, 2003; O'Brien & Forde, 2015), it is evident that for the teachers in our study, their induction into the profession lacked adequate support from leadership. Therefore, the second consideration is that school leadership revise induction processes to ensure they are conducive to supporting beginning drama teachers. Thus, a more collaborative style of supporting teachers rather than a 'top down' surveillance approach is required. In other words, leadership must understand, at ground level, how these teachers are faring and whether they are *managing* or merely *coping*. This approach would reveal how stressed many beginning drama teachers become as they navigate complex school processes and extensive extra-curricular responsibilities.

Given the importance for teachers to develop self-efficacy, leadership must be in tune with their teachers and provide support and positive feedback on their accomplishments (Day & Gu, 2007). This will help to promote professional identity salience and, in turn, retain these

committed and enthusiastic teachers (Papatraianou & Le Cornu, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001).

Anderson (2002) noted, “A concerted effort is required by universities and schooling systems to make teacher pre-service training and induction effective to equip these teachers for the arduous journey that lies ahead” (p. 92). As this research has revealed, participants’ pre-service education did not adequately prepare them to manage systems, policies and bureaucracy (AITSL Standard 7). Indeed, this issue was identified by all participants as causing them the most difficulty and stress in their beginning years of teaching. Therefore, the third consideration is that AITSL Standard 7 be addressed more substantially throughout pre-service training and, if possible, dedicated time with mentor teachers during practicum placements. Addressing this deficit must include teacher educators upskilling and having access to key administrative programs, such as SEQTA and Connect.

Finally, the issue of time (or lack thereof) for beginning drama teachers to reflect on and develop their professional learning must be addressed (AITSL Standard 6). For the participants in this study, they lacked the capacity to engage in professional development. This was disconcerting, as was the lack of constructive feedback they received from supervisors (leadership) and mentors to improve their teaching practices. Whilst they were aware of the relevant sources of professional learning available for drama teachers, such as through their professional association, the rigours of the job and additional hours directing extra-curricular programs in the evenings and on weekends, meant they simply lacked the time to take up these opportunities. Unfortunately, for these beginning drama teachers, the lack of time dedicated to their professional development had repercussions for their self-efficacy. Clearly, a revision of the workload for beginning drama teachers with additional and extensive extra-curricular responsibilities must be a focus for schools if they wish to continue to benefit from the expertise and energy these young and vibrant teachers bring to the profession.

## **Conclusion**

This study highlights the importance of having the necessary knowledge, skills and expertise, identified by the AITSL Professional Standards, to grow from the graduate to proficient standard for beginning drama teachers. Pre-service education providers must understand how their graduates perform and progress in schools in the current zeitgeist of change and challenge (Hong et al, 2018). Therefore, continued research that elucidates the plight of beginning teachers and posits methods to best support them must remain a priority.

Our research also acknowledges the need for beginning drama teachers to move beyond a ‘coping’ capacity to where they can ‘manage’ challenges, bringing about greater satisfaction, professional learning and improved self-efficacy. However, this requires a considered approach to their induction where support is provided from professional networks and school leadership. If school leadership, systems and sectors ignore the troubling experiences of these beginning teachers, our schools will continue to see many exceptional teachers leave the profession.

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