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# Stop the Teaching Profession Eating its Young: Invest in Research on Novice Teachers

**Wilfried Admiraal**
Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway

Teaching is a fascinating profession. As a teacher you support young people to discover the world, to get to know each other and themselves, and to grow and develop their knowledge and skills. A teacher witnesses the development of children, youngsters, and adults and is even part of it. And not only once and not of only one, but many times and of many. Yet teaching is also an emotionally challenging profession and high levels of teacher stress have been linked with adverse professional outcomes, including burnout, absenteeism, and attrition (Bottiani et al., 2019). Teachers face multiple and interacting demands from students, parents, colleagues, and administrators, and all these demands may contribute to teacher stress. These demands refer to, amongst others, handling an excessive workload, managing disruptive students, interactions with colleagues, lack of resources and support and evaluations from administrator and parents (Richards, et al., 2019). Over time patterns of chronic high stress and low coping of teachers are associated with reduced feelings of job satisfaction (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007), decreased motivation and teaching effectiveness (Santoro, 2018) and feelings of burnout (Bottiani et al., 2019), which is characterized by the depletion of emotional resources, feeling negatively to others, and losing a feeling of accomplishment in one's work (Leiter & Maslach, 2008). Teachers' feelings of dissatisfaction and burnout might, in turn, lead to intention to leave the profession (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015).

The attrition rate of early-career teachers, in particular, appears to be high. During the first years of teaching, not all teachers do feel well prepared for their job and some feel insufficient supported in school. Beginning teachers try to apply the theoretical knowledge they learned at the university but struggle with the reality of their class and school. This gap between theory (as addressed in teacher education) and practice (as manifested in schools) is called the practice or reality shock, which relates to the transition from learner to professional and is not limited to the teaching profession. Many professions, including physicians, nurses, lawyers and social workers, have their own descriptions of troublesome first encounters with work. Teachers must combine many tasks at the same time, including instruction, creating a safe learning environment for their students, realizing quality learning for all their students, managing classroom discipline as well as collaborating with their colleagues and school principal. In many countries, almost half of the teachers leave the profession within their first five years (Räsänen et al., 2020). When institutions educate teachers who do not remain in the field, it means a discrepancy between economic resources invested and the professional output that the teacher contributes back in the institution, school and teaching profession. In light of the national teacher shortages across Europe, high numbers of novice teachers leaving the profession are highly undesirable.

In order to support the development of interventions to not only keep novice teachers in the profession, but also improve their mental and physical health and consequently their effectiveness for student learning, research into novice teachers and their teaching should be intensified at three levels: 1) at the level of teacher education, 2) at the level of the school, and 3) at the level of the individual novice teacher.

**At the level of teacher education: novice-teachers' professional preparation**

Teacher education programs are found to be critical in preparing teacher candidates for the profession and in extending support for new teachers into the induction years (Bastian & Marks, 2017). Extensive teacher preparation is significantly correlated with novices' self-efficacy, their focus on student learning, and retention (Tricarico, et al., 2015). Induction initiatives typically aim to improve the quality of beginning teachers by providing on-site support and guidance which is especially critical during the first two or three years of teaching. Although a large variety exist in setups of induction programs, teacher education program faculty mostly provide focused coursework and supports geared toward effective clinical experiences, extended student teaching in year-long placements (or even two three school years), constructive mentoring offered by a university supervisor and a mentor teacher in school, and opportunities centered on reflection. Additionally, Darling-Hammond et al. (2002) found that high quality and comprehensive induction programs with mentoring tempered the negative effects of poor preparation and teachers' desires to leave the profession. DeAngelis et al. (2013) support this claim and add that a combination of effective teacher preparation and comprehensive school district induction supports help to increase teacher retention. Yet Reeves et al. (2022), based on a secondary analysis of TALIS 2018 US teacher data, did not find many significant relationships between induction activities on the one hand, and teacher practices, teacher self-efficacy and teachers' job satisfaction, on the other hand. Nevertheless, teacher education and school system induction support seem to be crucial for new teachers' development, retention in the profession, and impact on student learning. Research on which activities in which context for whom should provide better insights in the effectiveness of novice-teachers' preparation for their job in school.

**At the level of the school: novice-teachers' working conditions in school**

In addition to initial teacher education and induction programs, providing new teachers with support in school that they need may ensure that they do not get overwhelmed and lower their levels of stress (Bastian & Marks, 2017). In an interview study with 21 former teachers who recently quitted the teaching profession, Amitai and Van Houtte (2022) show that the main reason for the new teachers (i.c. teachers with teaching experience of five years or less) to leave their job were job insecurity and workload. With respect to job security teachers mentioned it takes too long to get a tenured position and that schools essentially count on temporary teachers who fill in for tenured teachers who are absent, mostly due to sickness, burnout and parental leaves. Despite being essential for the teacher supply of schools, new teachers who were all employed on temporary contracts felt that they were not treated well. The second 'push factor', workload, includes the lack of time to prepare teaching and the blurring boundaries between private and professional lives. Other push factors that the novice job-leavers mentioned refer to classroom management difficulties and lack of support from colleagues and school leadership. In general, new teachers

addressed the lack of teamwork and collaboration among colleagues, and the need for feedback to improve their sense of competence in class and for mentorship that could lead to more trusting relationships among teachers. An open-door policy where teachers observe each other would also serve the needs of early-career teachers.

The important role of supportive colleagues has been confirmed in a qualitative study of new teachers in a year-long series of professional development workshops (Stewart & Jansky, 2022). The participants mentioned that they would have liked to have a dialogue about their teaching experiences with more experienced teachers outside the professional development program, but that these teachers were difficult to access. Keeping a good and open relationship with veteran teachers, in particular, has been mentioned as a challenge, although these veteran teachers were mostly the ones who were assigned to the new teachers to support them. Good relationships, a collaborative work culture in schools and a positive work climate in schools are not only beneficial for early-career teachers, but will support teachers from all career stages. Research on working conditions in school that support novice teachers' in their work and further development and decrease their feelings of distress will contribute novice-teachers' effectiveness, job satisfaction and retention.

**At the level of the individual: novice-teachers' coping, resilience, and immunity**

At the level of the individual novice teachers, three concepts seem to be important for future research: Coping, Resilience and Immunity.

**Coping**

The relationship between novice teachers' stress and consequences for professional outcomes can mediated by their responses to stress, so-called coping strategies (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Coping strategies are described in terms of efforts to manage (i.e., master, reduce or tolerate) a troubled person-environment relation and play a significant role in teachers' adaptation to internal and external demands and situations appraised as stressful. It appears that emotion and avoidance-oriented coping strategies are often related to increased stress and well-being problems and problem-oriented coping strategies have often been related to less disruptive classroom behavior and increased student achievements, even in contexts with challenging student behavior (Bottiani et al., 2019). Yet emotion regulation strategies have also been positively associated with teachers' well-being with teachers reporting cognitive reappraisal (e.g. relabeling student disruptive behavior in class) showing less emotional exhaustion (Donker et al., 2020). Searching and receiving help from supervisors, mentors and peers is one of the most mentioned coping strategies of beginning teachers (Lindqvist, 2019). Other coping strategies novice teachers apply to deal with stress are self-reflection, diversions, minimizing, positive reappraisal and avoidance as well as more logical analysis and problem solving (Admiraal, 2020).

**Resilience**

Resilience can be understood as the interaction of personal and contextual resources that helps novice teachers to

bounce back and forth from negative and traumatic events in their teaching profession (Mansfield et al., 2016). This ability to stand against the natural stressors and setbacks in teaching as a tough profession minimizes teachers' stress and burnout, improves their commitment, job satisfaction, well-being, instructional quality, work enjoyment, motivation, professional identity, retention, agency, self-efficacy, and consequently students' engagement, motivation, and academic achievement (Richards et al., 2016). Beltman (2021) distinguished three different perspectives on teacher resilience, which may have consequences for research on novice-teachers' resilience. First, a person perspective considers resilience as an individual trait that manifests during traumatic moments. According to this perspective, a resilient person is one who is able to bounce back in the face of adversity. Second, a process perspective, which considers resilience as the result of person-context interaction. It defines resilience as a process in which a person, actively, utilizes appropriate strategies to maintain their commitment and well-being in the face of challenges. Third, a context perspective, which understands resilience as the ability to adapt to a tense context and maintain one's ability in a challenging socio-cultural context.

## Immunity

Numerous studies tried to see the issue of teachers' psychology from the positive side and think of what makes teachers tick. In a landmark study on how the psychological attributes of L2 teachers meet with the contextual features of language classroom settings, Hiver (2015) and Hiver & Dornyei (2017) introduced the concept of teacher immunity, a term fostered from medical science, to metaphorically conceptualize a protective mechanism developed by teachers to effectively deal with contextual adversities and professional stressors, and in turn, help them to become and maintain effective for student learning. Teacher immunity features four distinct characteristics namely specificity (a particular coping strategy is geared to a distinct stressor), memory (the ability to recourse to past experiences in dealing with current and possible future tensions), adaptability (to adjust constructively in addressing changes), and durability (internalizing the property as a teacher identity).

## Concluding remark

Insights from research at these three different levels, from different perspectives and with different concept might help early-career teachers to handle their first stressful teaching experiences and reduce their feelings of distress. Moreover, teacher educators as well as school principals might use insights from this study to improve both schooling and working conditions of early-career teachers. In this way, we might change the teaching profession from a profession that eats it young into a profession that feeds its young.

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