Building and Sustaining a Teaching Career

Strategies for professional experience, wellbeing and mindful practice

Professional experience in initial teacher education programs can be both a challenging and rewarding experience. As student teachers take their first steps in the classroom, they often face crises of confidence and encounter stresses that compromise their teaching and learning. Within this context, concepts of wellbeing, resilience and self-efficacy are critical components in their success and longevity as educators.

Building and Sustaining a Teaching Career emphasises the importance of mindfulness for pre-service teachers undertaking professional experience. It introduces the coping strategies, informal and formal practices, time management and organisational skills, and positive psychology critical to self-care. The text uses case studies, ‘fill your bucket’ strategy-building solutions, reflection activities and discussion and journaling questions designed to build capacity and develop reader knowledge. Pre-service teacher voices support the text throughout, highlighting key elements through real-world perspectives and experiences.

Drawing upon a combination of teaching experience and education research, and referencing the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers throughout, Narelle Lemon and Sharon McDonough present thoughtful, practical approaches that equip pre-service teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge for embarking on a successful teaching career.

Narelle Lemon is an Associate Professor of Education in the Department of Education at Swinburne University.

Sharon McDonough is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Education at Federation University Australia.
Cambridge University Press acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional owners of Country throughout Australia.

Cambridge University Press acknowledges the Māori people as tangata whenua of Aotearoa New Zealand.

We pay our respects to the First Nation Elders of Australia and New Zealand, past, present and emerging.
Narelle Lemon
and Sharon McDonough

Building—and—Sustaining
a Teaching Career

Strategies for professional experience, wellbeing and mindful practice
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ABOUT THE AUTHORS</th>
<th>VIII</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>IX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOW TO USE THIS BOOK</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GLOSSARY OF TERMS</td>
<td>XI</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Introduction: building mindful resources as a pre-service teacher**  
1  
Building mindful resources throughout a teaching career  
1  
Before we begin: a note on terminology  
1  
Becoming a teacher: the role of self-efficacy and coping strategies  
2  
Learning to become a teacher in contemporary contexts  
5  
Mindfulness in the school curriculum  
6  
Reading and navigating this book  
6  
Summary  
11  
Recommended reading  
12

**SECTION 1  Mindfulness and its place in being a teacher**  
13

### 1 What is mindfulness?  
15  
Looking after your wellbeing while engaging with this text  
15  
Beginning to think about mindfulness  
16  
What is mindfulness?  
17  
Mindfulness and awareness  
20  
Mindfulness and curiosity  
22  
Mindfulness and being non-judgemental  
24  
Mindfulness and being present  
25  
Self-compassion and self-care  
26  
Summary  
28  
Recommended reading  
28

### 2 Becoming and being a mindful teacher  
29  
Resilience in teachers and teaching  
29  
Coping strategies for sustaining a teaching career  
31  
Being mindful as a teacher  
34  
Wellbeing and flourishing  
37  
Summary  
39  
Recommended reading  
40
SECTION 2
Developing mindful practices as a teacher

3 Developing the confidence to teach: communicating and working with others

Confidence to grow as a teacher: having self-compassion 44
Confidence and presence as a teacher 49
Confidence to enter a school or early childhood centre 51
Confidence to talk to a mentor teacher 54
Confidence to share reflections 58
The classroom is so different to back home 61
Summary 65
Recommended reading 65
Additional resources 65

4 Developing your skills as a teacher: learning in school and university contexts

The role of professional experience in initial teacher education 67
How do you move from being a novice to a competent practitioner? 69
Group work 72
What if the students don’t listen to me? 75
Developing your voice as a teacher 79
Using verbal and visual cues in the classroom 82
Working with digital tools 84
Working in online spaces to learn or teach 88
Participating in online discussion boards as a teacher and learner 91
Social media for learning 94
Summary 95
Recommended reading 96
Additional resources 96

5 Developing as a teacher: learning from professional experience

The role of professional experience in learning to become a teacher 98
Learning about school contexts during professional experience 100
Being a part of the staff room and school community 107
Learning from mentors who inspire 111
Fears and concerns about professional experience 115
Working professionally with staff and peers 117
Getting to know the students 119
Being flexible in the classroom 123
Is a career in teaching for me? 126
Working productively with your mentor teacher and dilemmas 128
Summary 132
Recommended reading 132
Additional resources 132

6 Learning to teach: identifying and addressing stressors 133
What challenges do pre-service and early career teachers face? 133
Dealing with challenges proactively 135
Developing time-management skills to organise yourself 136
Sitting with vulnerability: receiving and giving feedback 140
Concluding 142
Being a mature-age student 145
Being a partner, parent or carer 147
Managing expectations 150
Managing your study load 153
Working with an inner critic: strategies for dealing with perfectionism 156
Summary 159
Recommended reading 160

7 Organising and caring for yourself as a teacher 161
Caring for yourself as a teacher 161
Getting into the flow of things 163
Responding to emotions with awareness 164
Knowing the curriculum and responding to change 167
Managing deadlines and communicating effectively 170
Juggling study, work and life 174
Planning and meeting the teaching standards 176
Summary 178
Recommended reading 179

Conclusion: putting your best foot forward 180
Transition into the profession and learning from professional experience 181
Developing personal skills and strategies to inform your ongoing practice 183
Using reflection to guide your future practice and direction as a teacher 184
Final thoughts 185

REFERENCES 187
INDEX 197
About the authors

Narelle Lemon is an Associate Professor in the Department of Education at Swinburne University. Her research areas are focused on participation and engagement. She explores these areas through a variety of avenues, including creativity and arts education, positive psychology aimed at mindfulness practice and coping strategies, and social-media use for learning and professional development. Narelle blogs at www.exploreandcreateco.com on mindfulness and self-care, tweets as @Rellypops, and curates an online project on Instagram (@exploreandcreateco) to promote stories on how people from various disciplines apply mindfulness in their lives.

Sharon McDonough is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Education at Federation University Australia, where she also researches initial teacher education and teacher development. Sharon draws on sociocultural theories of teacher emotion and resilience. She uses these theories to: best prepare and support teachers for entry into the teaching profession; and to support professional learning for teachers and teacher educators across the lifespan of their careers.
Acknowledgements

Thank you to our editors at Cambridge University Press. You have made this journey for us as writers ever so smooth. We couldn’t have done it without this amazing team – you believed in us from the start and for this we are forever grateful. Thank you to Michael Spurr whose dedication, passion, vision and amazing sense of humour has been a shining light in this writing endeavour. Your support has been tremendous to us collectively and individually. Thanks also to Siobhan Privitera for her amazing attention to detail and ongoing support as we progressed through making this book what it is. And we acknowledge Vilija Stephens who was gracious with her time in encouraging our proposal; she had the vision to see what we wanted to achieve with this book before moving onto her next exciting adventure.

Our appreciation goes to all the pre-service teachers who have embraced our thinking and who have responded to new ways of being. A special thank you to the pre-service teachers who engaged in our research and shared their experiences with an openness to support their own learning as well as that of their peers.

Thank you to our colleagues in initial teacher education who read, reviewed, offered feedback and scaffolded our thinking.

And thanks to our partners who constantly supported us and embraced our crazy ideas, moments of insight, and our wish to share with others the ways in which to place wellbeing at the heart of what needs doing.

Our love and much appreciation goes to Mat. Thank you for your ongoing care, support, trust and kindness.

Thanks to Rohan for his ongoing support and love that makes all else possible.

Sharon would like to thank Narelle for her ongoing support, friendship and work during this project, particularly in the final stage of the book, when Narelle went above and beyond in finalising the manuscript. For this, Sharon is extremely grateful.

The authors and Cambridge University Press would like to thank the following for permission to reproduce material in this book:


Extracts from AITSL Australian Professional Standards for Teachers © 2011 Education Services Australia Limited as the legal entity for the COAG Education Council (Education Council). Cambridge University Press has reproduced extracts of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers in this publication with permission from the copyright owner. Other than as permitted by the Copyright Act 1968 (Cth), no part of this material may be reproduced, stored, published, performed, communicated or adapted by any means without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

Every effort has been made to trace and acknowledge copyright. The publisher apologises for any accidental infringement and welcomes information that would redress this situation.
How to use this book

This book features a number of activities and exercises designed to help you reflect on and expand your knowledge as you progress through the chapters. These are listed below.

**FILL YOUR BUCKET** – throughout the text, the authors provide a range of strategies that you may wish to explore and employ in your practice. Some strategies may resonate with you now and others at another time, but they are aimed at equipping you with a toolkit that you can carry through your professional experience and into the early stages of your career.

**PRE-SERVICE STUDENTS’ NARRATIVES** – the use of narratives signals that you are being oriented to read and engage with the experiences of other pre-service teachers. The narratives are drawn and developed from ethically-approved research data and, as such, are grounded by real-life challenges faced by pre-service teachers at different stages of their university studies.

**MINDFUL JOURNALING AND REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS** – mindful journaling and reflective questions run through the text, guiding you through activities that allow you to further engage in mindful thinking and writing. They are based on mindfulness principles and practices, and provide the opportunity for you to reflect on your own learning and growth as a teacher.

Some of the language of these questions connects to the graduate level of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers from the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). The discussion questions can be used either in class or as part of online learning. This is to support you in becoming familiar with these standards, but also to assist you in working towards them.

For further detail about each of these features, please refer to the Introduction (pp. 1–12).
# Glossary of terms

**AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE FOR TEACHING AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP (AITSL)** is a national body for Australian states and territories that standardises teaching capabilities and promotes excellence in the profession of teaching and school leadership.

**AUSTRALIAN PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS FOR TEACHERS (GRADUATE LEVEL)** are national standards from AITSL used to evaluate pre-service teachers and their growth as teachers during their teacher education studies. The pre-service teachers are assessed within teacher education subjects and while they are on professional experience.

**AWARENESS** is a capacity to be present. Awareness arises through mindfulness when a person pays attention, on purpose, in the present moment and with a non-judgemental stance.

**BEING NON-JUDGEMENTAL** requires attention and practise to develop the habit of thinking in a way where you are not self-critical and are aware of your self-talk. In this process, there is a clear need for you to notice and alter destructive or maladaptive behaviours, while simultaneously working towards radical self-acceptance – that is, acceptance of yourself just the way you are.

**BEING PRESENT** is at the core of mindfulness. It is about noticing what you are doing, thinking, being or saying at a particular moment in time. By paying attention, over time, you can develop your ability to be present through informal and formal mindfulness practices.

**CONFIDENCE** is the feeling of trust or the belief that you have in relation to someone or something.

**COPING** is to deal successfully with a challenging situation or experience.

**CURiosity** is a mindset that enables you to focus your attention and can be viewed as a motivator for you to explore your environment with an appreciation of novelty, challenge and uncertainty.

**EUDAIMONIC WELLBEING** is a focus on meaningful living and self-realisation.

**GROWTH MINDSET** is where you can look at any situation, especially difficult situations or challenges, with a view that they can be an opportunity for you to grow, develop, learn and change for the better.

**HEDONIC WELLBEING** is a focus on the notion that increased pleasure and decreased pain leads to happiness.

**INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION** comprises the studies undertaken to qualify as a teacher.

**LITERACY AND NUMERACY TEST FOR INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION (LANTITE)** is a literacy and numeracy test that pre-service teachers complete during their initial teacher education studies in Australia.

**MENTOR TEACHER OR MENTOR** is a teacher in a classroom or an educational setting who works with pre-service teachers during their professional experience placements. (Note that we use this term in the textbook rather than ‘supervising teacher’.)

**MINDFUL JOURNALING** is capturing your reflections and thoughts in a journal mindfully (that is, being curious, aware and present without being judgemental).

**MINDFUL TEACHER** is a teacher who embraces their informal and formal practices, and shares these, as appropriate, with their students in a respectful way.

**MINDFULNESS** is when you pay close attention to what is happening in the present moment, rather than allowing your thoughts to be
distracted by what happened yesterday or what you are going to do next. The ultimate goal of mindfulness is to generate and increase self-awareness. Mindfulness involves an attitude of acceptance, curiosity and awareness of the present moment.

**MINDFULNESS PRACTICES** are about slowing down the mind. They are about caring for your body and your feelings, and shifting out of your head. There are formal and informal mindfulness practices.

**POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY** is the scientific study of human flourishing and an applied approach to optimal functioning or how you can be the best version of yourself.

**PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS** are those studying to be future teachers in an initial teacher education degree.

**PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE** refers to the periods of time that pre-service teachers are in schools or educational settings. Also known as ‘practicum’ or ‘placement’.

**RESILIENCE** is how you bounce forward after a critical moment or experience; that is, your recovery after a challenge and what you have learned about yourself and a situation.

**SELF-CARE** refers to actions and attitudes that you undertake to contribute to the maintenance of your wellbeing (physical, emotional, psychological, spiritual and so on) and the proactive actions you take to assist your personal growth.

**SELF-COMPASSION** refers to treating yourself with kindness, care and concern in the face of negative life events. It is about supporting yourself, and being attentive to directing compassion inwards.

**SELF-EFFICACY** is the belief you have in your capacity to implement the actions or behaviours necessary to produce specific results.

**TEACHING PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT (TPA)** is an assessment tool used to evaluate the practical skills and knowledge of pre-service teachers. Pre-service teachers collect evidence of their practice to complete a TPA in the final year of their initial teacher education program; it is assessed by initial teacher educator providers (for example universities) and is a requirement for graduation.