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Three Casual Relief Teachers in Australian Primary Schools: Their Experiences and Perspectives Over One School Year

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Abstract: This study investigates the lived experiences of three casual relief teachers (CRTs) and their work within Australian primary schools for a period of one school year. Practice architecture theory was used as a theoretical framework to examine whether participants saw any advantages to working on a casual basis, how they think casual teaching could be improved in terms of access to accreditation support, and whether any growth to their professional practice took place during the course of the year. Monthly diary entries and two semi-structured interviews from each participant revealed some advantages to casual teaching, such as being able to work across different schools. Participants discussed the need for CRTs to complete accreditation in a timely manner and gain access to relevant professional learning. This study provides evidence of the complex and varied backgrounds and motivations of CRTs. Implications for future research in the area are also discussed.

Key words: casual relief teacher; primary school teachers; practice architecture theory

Introduction

Casual employment is a prevalent form of work within the education sector (Nicholas & Wells, 2016). Casual relief teachers (CRTs) are also known widely around Australia as supply teachers, temporary relief teachers, and relief teachers (Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership, 2018). CRTs make up a significant proportion of the workforce. They serve to maintain the continuity of learning for students despite staff absences and are vital to schools' operation. In Australia, CRTs have the same qualifications and meet the same legal and procedural requirements (e.g. criminal background checks, medical certificates) as teachers who are employed on a permanent or full-time basis. The Australian Institute of School Leadership reported in 2018 that only 25% of graduate teachers secured permanent classroom teaching roles while two in three teachers worked on a casual basis or gained temporary contracts. It has also been reported that students are taught by CRTs for a cumulative equivalent of one year during their schooling from Kindergarten to Year 12 (Nicholas & Wells, 2017). Thus, CRTs are a vital part of the Australian education system.

Literature Review

Previous studies have focussed on experiences of CRTs across different educational settings, including primary and secondary schools (e.g. Jenkins, Smith & Maxwell, 2009) and tertiary institutions (e.g. Dean, Harden-Thew, & Thomas, 2017). A common theme reported by these studies is that CRTs were often neglected and alienated from the school communities where they worked. For example, Bamberry (2011) investigated perceptions of casual teaching by 20 CRTs in primary schools. He reported that the CRTs felt an acute sense of isolation due to their itinerant status and that five of the participants contemplated leaving the teaching profession due to this sense of marginalisation.

Related to the sense of alienation were CRTs' feelings of being less legitimate than permanent teachers and being perceived by other staff as "the 'lesser' group of teachers" (Colcott, 2009, p. 3). Some CRTs felt a sense of powerlessness over their role compared to other staff, particularly regarding classroom management and building rapport with students. CRTs reported feelings of being in lower status compared to other teachers due to students' disruptive behaviour. For example, participants from Bamberry's (2011) study reported that as CRTs, students would have the attitude of "... you are just a casual ... you are just like scum and [the students] would run you around" (p. 61). The sense of lacking authority was further exacerbated when they felt unsupported by other staff and there was no follow-up by the executive staff about an incident of student misbehaviour. Some CRTs felt that " "You are an island as a casual teacher. No one is looking out for you" (Driedger-Enns, 2014, p. 94). We have also found that CRTs felt that their status was diminished because "... you are scraping for work and relying so much on opinions and attitudes of other [teachers] to determine your livelihood" (Uchida, Cavanagh, & Moloney, 2019, p. 8).

CRTs lack access to school-wide information and support for processes such as accreditation, professional learning and mentoring, as they operate on the margins of school communities (Charteris, Jenkins, Bannister-Tyrell, & Jones, 2017). Nicholas and Wells (2016) recommended CRTs have access to ongoing, relevant professional learning sessions as provided to permanent teachers so that CRTs are kept informed about the latest pedagogical practices and policy updates, as well as to ensure appropriate progress towards proficient accreditation. However, Uchida, Cavanagh, & Lane (2020) recently reported that CRTs remain disadvantaged when attempting to access information regarding professional learning. Approximately 40% of experienced CRTs with regular work reported to us that they had never been invited to professional learning sessions by schools where they worked. This number rose to 70% for early career CRTs with less than five years of teaching experience.

Not all aspects of casual teaching are challenging or negative. Currently, a small number of studies have considered the benefits of teachers working on a casual basis. Some CRTs regard their work as legitimate, fulfilling, and advantageous for their current needs. Although CRTs may not be able to build the same level of rapport as the classroom teacher, they are still essential to the schools and can still provide care and support to students in their care (Uchida, Cavanagh & Moloney, 2019). Some CRTs also decide to teach on a casual basis by choice due to factors such as being a caregiver to their families, not desiring the workload of a full-time load, or simply for the flexibility that casual teaching can afford (Uchida, Cavanagh & Lane, 2020).

Although previous studies have investigated the plight of CRTs and their various challenges, we have not found any published study which has investigated CRTs' experiences over time using their diary entries and interview responses. This paper reports CRTs' experiences over one school year to seek answers to the following three research questions:

- What do CRTs report as the advantages of their casual role?

- How do CRTs think that the experience of casual teaching could be improved?
- How do CRTs' views about casual teaching change over one school year?

Theoretical Framework

Practice architecture theory was first conceptualised by Kemmis and Grootenboer (2008) and continues to evolve as it is applied across different educational settings. The theoretical framework can be applied to explore human activity within a context or setting, also referred to as a 'project' (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008). At its core, practice architecture theory examines the actions and social lives of individuals. According to Kemmis and Mutton (2012), practice architecture is comprised of three main components: the cultural-discursive arrangement (sayings), material-economic arrangement (doings) and socio-political arrangement (relatings). These three elements enmesh within a practice and can occur within, or be brought to, a social setting.

The cultural-discursive element of practice architecture theory is also known as the sayings within a practice architecture. It involves discourse or specific jargon used by individuals situated in a practice, or an agreed level of formality of speech between different individuals. Examples of sayings include Shakespearean language taught by secondary English teachers, or slang used between students in the classroom. The material-economic arrangements or the doings point to the ways in which an environment is physically set up or established, which can enable activities to occur, or constrain people from performing certain tasks. Examples of doings include teachers' access to technological or other physical resources to facilitate their lessons, or how they arrange the classroom furniture to foster a collaborative environment for students. Finally, the relatings include inter-relationships, power dynamics and hierarchies that exist between individuals, or groups of people. Examples of relatings include cliques that exist in the staffroom and the rapport built between teachers and students.

Previous studies have applied practice architecture theory across early childhood centres (e.g., Salamon et al., 2016), primary and secondary schools (e.g., Kemmis & Mutton, 2012) and tertiary settings (e.g., Hemmings et al., 2013). The present study uses practice architectures to analyse the ways in which three CRTs from Australian primary schools experienced their work through exploring their sayings, doings and relatings as revealed in their diary entries and semi-structured interviews conducted over one school year.

Method

Participants and Data Collection

Three CRTs were involved in this study. Participant recruitment was conducted through a Facebook group known as the Relief Teaching Ideas page, where approximately 46,000 teachers across different specialities (primary/secondary) and work arrangements (full-time/part-time/casual) provide support to each other. For this study, eligibility was limited to teachers working in primary school settings who had taught previously on a casual basis. Following approval to conduct the study from the authors' university ethics committee, participants were asked to complete a survey designed to collect demographic and qualitative information about their experiences as CRTs. 104 participants completed this initial survey which included an invitation to participate in an additional phase of the study where they would complete diary entries and be interviewed. A total of 12 participants agreed to take part, with five signing the participant information and consent form.

The study ran from February of one year to January of the following year. Data were collected through monthly diary entries and two semi-structured interviews, held at six-month intervals in July and then in January of the following year. Participants were sent a Word document on the first day of each month which contained five open-ended questions to gather information about their casual teaching work and to promote reflection. The first two questions asked participants how many days they had worked on a casual basis, how many schools they had worked at, and the nature of their employment (e.g., whether they worked day to day across multiple schools or on 'blocks' of consecutive days at the same school) in the previous month. The next two questions related to the three main elements of practice architecture theory: sayings (asking participants to describe their identity as a teacher), doings (asking participants about forms of technologies and classroom resources they were able to access at schools) and relatings (asking participants how they built rapport with students and staff). The final question was a 'free space' where they could reflect on particular events that they felt were interesting or notable for that month. The collection of diary entries commenced at the beginning of February and a total of 11 diary entries were collected from each participant. Initially, all five participants completed the diary entries and were fully involved in the study. However, results from only three participants are discussed due to one participant withdrawing from the study and another providing insufficient diary entries.

Participants also completed an individual semi-structured interview at the halfway point of the data collection in July and at the conclusion in January of the following year. The interviews were conducted over the telephone or through Skype video calls and focused on delving deeper into participants' responses in the diary entries and emphasised the three elements of practice architecture theory. Thus, the interview questions were slightly different for each participant. Each of the interviews lasted between 30 minutes and one hour and they were recorded for transcription purposes. The audio files were later transcribed digitally by Google's text-to-speech function, then manually edited to ensure accuracy of the transcription.

Data Analysis

After all the diary entries were collected, the relevant questions from diary entries were categorised into either sayings, doings, or relatings for each participant as three separate Word documents for each component of the practice architecture theory framework. The 'free space' reflections were also collated into one document for all the entries from February to December. The diary entries, as well as the transcribed audio from interviews, were imported into NVivo software. The data were firstly coded, which entailed highlighting sections from selected sentences or short paragraphs in the text and ascribing a descriptive code to capture each section's main meaning. For example, a line from the diary entry, "It is my first year of teaching and I have not received any support. But I wouldn't expect schools to support me while I'm working as a casual teacher" was coded as a theme of "Accreditation – no support first year out." This process of coding to gain an overview of participants' responses was repeated for all diary entries and interviews. 258 codes in total were generated across the data set of 33 diary entries and six interview transcripts. After the coding process, all similar codes were combined to create themes. For example, the codes from Becky's diary entries which detailed "Can built rapport with multiple students," "No need to write reports" and "Too scared to go permanent" were combined to create the theme "Reasons for teaching on a casual basis." Creating themes allowed the overall narrative for each participant to emerge.

Participant Demographics

Pseudonyms have been used to protect participants' identities.

Ava was an early career teacher from Queensland with approximately one year of experience as a CRT when the study began. She completed her Master of Teaching in England before arriving in Australia and, although she desired to work full-time, her visa conditions meant she could only work for a maximum of 40 hours a fortnight. She initially volunteered at her local school to gain some experience before her first day as a CRT. As well as teaching casually across three primary schools on a day-to-day basis, she was a qualified early childhood teacher and worked on a casual basis in early childhood centres.

Becky was an early career teacher from New South Wales with approximately two years of experience as a CRT at the commencement of the study. She lived in regional New South Wales with two children. She had worked across 12 schools in her local area but had two preferred schools where she frequently worked individual days. At the conclusion of the study, Becky accepted a part-time contract at a School for Specific Purposes (SSP) where she previously taught on a casual basis. SSP is a school which caters for children with additional learning and support needs (NSW Department of Education, 2020).

Chloe was an experienced teacher from New South Wales who had been a primary school teacher for approximately 15 years. She worked full-time for over a decade until she decided to teach on a casual basis approximately five years prior to the start of the study. She lived in a major regional city in New South Wales and had regular CRT work as a sustainability teacher at her preferred school, as well as day to day casual teaching at other schools.

Results

This section explores each participant's experiences using practice architecture elements as a framework. It draws upon their diary entries and interview transcripts to gain insights into their respective sayings, doings, and relatings. The sayings focus on how the participants talked about and conceptualised their professional practice as CRTs. The doings detail how participants reported they had gained access to physical and informational resources, such as professional learning and accreditation. The relatings explore the relationships that participants reported with students, staff, and the wider school community.

Ava *Sayings*

Ava described her role as a CRT at the beginning of the study by writing in her diary, "If a classroom teacher is sick, on training or a holiday, I get a phone call to cover the class." As well as being a teacher, she also wrote about her desire to take on further studies in the future. She expressed in her diary entry, "I've always wanted to be a researcher who knows what is actually happening in real-life classrooms so that my research is actually helpful." This identity as a researcher was an important facet of being a CRT that she "... always kept in mind when I visit schools and teach there."

Ava's confidence as a CRT grew as this study progressed. In July she reflected, "At first I had a script of sorts with me to ensure I talked about the expectations and consequences of the day" which allowed her to establish clear boundaries with students. However, this script was no longer needed towards the end of the year because "... now it comes naturally", even when she initially found classroom management difficult. She felt "... more like a real

teacher” compared to how she felt at the beginning of the year. She also conceded that “... as a new graduate teacher, I could feel that every moment was a learning opportunity,” and that casual teaching allowed her to feel more confident in her abilities as she experienced different classroom settings. In particular, she was able to overcome her initial apprehension about teaching students in the older grades.

Doings

Ava was happy to work across different schools and year levels to gain a wide variety of experiences. She wrote that “It always makes me excited to observe and see different schools and classrooms.” In particular, she closely observed aspects such as “the classroom display, behaviour management strategies ... and how [students’] books are marked” so that she could “learn from all of them or find interesting things to think about!” She also brought her own resources, including picture books, with her to conduct lessons.

Ava had limited access to accreditation support. She had not begun the process of accreditation at the conclusion of the study and was not approached to start the application by executive staff from any schools where she had worked. However, she conceded that “I wouldn’t expect schools to support me while I’m working as a casual teacher.” Another aspect where she lacked access was in teacher professional learning. During the study, she booked one professional learning session held on a weekday, but she had to cancel it because she was asked to teach that day. She participated in a free online lecture from a Massive Open Online Course learning platform about challenges in 21st century education but found that it was not relevant to her practices as a CRT. She reflected on how she was “... reluctant to turn down a day of work to travel far at my expense,” as barriers to accessing ongoing, quality professional learning opportunities that were aligned to her needs.

Relatings

Throughout the year, Ava expressed her desire to connect deeply with the students and build positive relationships with classes that she taught. In April, she reflected on various classroom management strategies she had developed, such as memorising the students’ names, personally greeting students on playground duty, and giving specific compliments to students about their work. Despite these strategies, however, she found that classroom management was the most difficult aspect of being a CRT. When asked what qualities made a ‘difficult’ school that she would be reluctant to come back to, she expressed, “I don’t want to battle with children who have no respect for teachers ... because, as a relief teacher, you can do nothing about it but suffer!” Volunteering at schools before accepting casual work from them allowed her to observe the general school atmosphere and how CRTs were perceived and treated by other staff and students.

Ava’s sense of being valued by schools came from being repeatedly booked by the same schools and for the same classes. She felt that “getting a call back is a way of getting recognition and because of it, I felt valued to a certain extent.” Positive relationships with the schools were also emphasised when she was asked to reflect on qualities of ‘good’ schools to work at. She expressed that she liked schools where “teachers are kind and welcoming” with a “clear behaviour plan.” Although she enjoyed casual teaching and the professional growth afforded to her, in November Ava expressed her wishes to gain a more consistent role in the future to build rapport with students. Her desire to have her own class and build relationship with students were consistent across multiple diary entries the entire school year.

Becky
Sayings

Becky described her professional role using a metaphor: “It’s like impromptu acting and being thrown on the stage without having lines rehearsed on a daily basis.” The unpredictable nature of casual teaching was also emphasised at the conclusion of this study when she used the same metaphor to surmise, “Even if your confidence has grown it’s a performance every day.” She also expressed a strong identity of herself as a professional on par with other teachers. Despite not knowing the students or their current progression of learning, she maintained that “As a casual we are following the same teaching standards even just after walking into a new class.”

Throughout the year, Becky emphasised that for her, working as a CRT was a choice. She saw casual teaching as a legitimate form of work and as the study progressed in July, she felt “... so sick of being asked when I am going permanent or long-term contract.” Her choice to remain as a CRT was due to several factors, including being a caregiver to her two children and other family members. Observing other staff working full-time, she expressed that “With the paperwork and extra workload of permanent teachers, I am not enticed.” Staying as a CRT also allowed Becky to maintain her desired work-life balance and protect her mental health. After she had a difficult day casual teaching, she reflected in her diary how she did not want teaching to affect her health anymore and that she felt “too scared to ever go permanent.” In her June diary entry, she reflected on her growth and articulated that “I am even more confident in the classroom and can feel my overall behaviour management skills being quite exceptional.” Her confidence had grown over time and solidified her professional identity as a capable CRT.

Doings

Becky had access to necessary technological and physical resources across all schools where she worked; however, in one school she brought her own laptop to connect to the Interactive Whiteboard as the technology at her school was unreliable. She also used a variety of her own resources such as a soft ball to play indoor games, pieces of lined paper, and various books with relief teaching ideas. She also spoke of having access to different classrooms as an advantage, because “I can use my ever-growing skills wherever I go [and] pass on ideas I have picked up on at other schools for individual students, classes, or even schools as a whole.” She liked the variety of experience that casual teaching afforded, and the opportunities for growth it offered.

Accreditation was a source of stress for Becky throughout this study. The process to complete her accreditation from Provisional to Proficient was challenging because she worked across many different schools. This process of Provisional to Proficient accreditation involves teachers collecting evidence for their professional practice against the seven Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (New South Wales Department of Education, 2017). She expressed frustration that “All my schools offer to help but then I end up ‘jumping ship’ and going where the work is and it’s just very hard to stay on track.” As well as access to a school where she could consistently gain work and support from executive staff, Becky felt that the accreditation process was inherently difficult for CRTs to complete. In an interview, she questioned, “Why aren’t the [NSW accrediting authority] listening to me when I say if you’re making us do accreditation, change it for casuals? At least modify it ... our role is different.”

Becky was able to attend two days of voluntary professional learning during the school year: one with Microsoft about digital tools for education, and another with the NSW

Teachers Federation. She also completed mandatory training for first aid offered at some schools. However, she found it difficult to keep up to date with all the required professional learning as she was employed across 12 schools.

Relatings

Becky felt a sense of belonging in most schools where she worked. To facilitate a culture of respect from students she was unfamiliar with, she called herself the "... travelling teacher ... I try and take the emphasis off the title 'casual' [to] build rapport and for students to understand the value of the casual teacher in schools." Thus, she found that framing herself as a 'travelling teacher' helped to legitimise her role to students. She also expressed her desire for staff to understand the nature of her casual role and be included as "part of the team" but also "balanced enough to know our role is different and that our job is challenging in its own right." She posited that she had good relationships with schools with "staff support, [they] compliment me on my efforts, and treat me as a part of them." She was reluctant to return to schools where the staff were uninviting; she eventually decided not to return to the school when she found several other school communities that had welcomed her more readily.

Being a CRT also meant Becky had opportunities to connect with students who were perceived as challenging by other staff. In September she recalled, "I've managed to have perfect behaviour out of [students] by building rapport very quickly and showing that I care. I won't forget those times." By the end of the study, she was able to secure a part-time contract at a school where she worked as a CRT on a regular basis.

Chloe *Sayings*

Chloe conceptualised being a CRT as "Going into a new classroom each day, not knowing what you are teaching/presenting/managing but having to figure it out very quickly before the dreaded bell goes." She also highlighted that CRTs must be "Flexible, adaptable and be willing to give anything a go." For Chloe, being a CRT was a choice as it offered the "... ability to say no to work ... and I like being able to walk away at the end of the day without having to write reports or do lots of planning." Her preference for casual teaching remained unchanged at the conclusion of this study. She stated, "I enjoy casual teaching, and plan to continue, mainly because of the flexibility, the variety, and reduction of accountability."

Chloe expressed at the halfway point of this study in June that her role as a CRT became easier with experience. She also acknowledged the vast difference between working on a casual basis and being a full-time classroom teacher. She emphasised how "CRTs don't have the everyday responsibilities that classroom teachers have to make sure their students are meeting the expected outcomes." When she was on a week-long 'block' with the same class, she put in hours of her personal time preparing lessons and resources to make sure she was "getting things right." She acknowledged that being a CRT was the best option for her because "I burn myself out within a week ... That's why I left full-time teaching I think, I was so stressed."

Doings

Chloe enjoyed having access to a variety of different schools, classrooms, and year levels. She disliked being “stuck in one classroom” but still preferred to teach at her regular school for a sense of familiarity and consistency.

Throughout the year, Chloe was also employed on a regular basis as a sustainability CRT teacher for half a day each week. This role allowed her to share her passion for the environment with students. As well as teaching students about sustainability, she was also able to implement school-wide changes. For example, in July she reflected how she had been “... a very big part of upgrading our vegetable garden, I have received funding for new worm farms and we are just starting to change our waste system and introduce rubbish free lunches.” She felt “... pleased to think that I’ve been the driver behind almost everything” in terms of making significant changes to the school’s renewed sustainability practices. However, she acknowledged that this change came about due to consistent work at one school where she could plan “... activities that go over several days [with] some continuity of teaching.”

Accreditation was difficult for Chloe to complete. Aspects such as compiling evidence for “Parent interactions ... and the reporting and assessment [were] incredibly hard to cover as a casual.” She questioned, “Why can’t the [New South Wales accrediting authority] change the system for accreditation so that you do it this way if you’re casual teaching and this way if you have your own class?” She reflected how “... the way [accreditation] has been set up, they are assuming that at some stage all teachers are wanting to, or are going to have, their own class.” In Chloe’s case, she chose not to take on any casual work that was for more than one week at a time.

In terms of professional learning, Chloe attended one mandatory first aid session at one of her regular schools. She did not undertake further voluntary professional learning sessions during the school year as she was still at the Provisional stage of her accreditation, which did not require her to complete specified hours of professional learning.

Relatings

Chloe worked as a CRT on a regular basis at the same primary school that her daughter attended. Therefore, she had already established some relationships and familiarity with the staff prior to her first day of work at the school. The other staff “know what I do and they trust me,” which allowed her to feel comfortable suggesting changes within her role as a sustainability teacher. However, she acknowledged that “You go to other schools sometimes and you get treated nowhere near as well.” Upon reflection, she stated that a positive school environment for her was “One where the staff are friendly and the leadership staff are supportive.” She also appreciated schools where she felt comfortable asking other teachers for help and to clarify her questions about her lessons. In addition, she stated that she liked working at schools with “... clear expectations of how all teachers – including casual teachers – should be treated.” Chloe positively regarded schools where explicit consequences related to student behaviour were strongly enforced.

To build rapport with students she was teaching for the first time, Chloe tried to “Start off the day with a smile and some friendly and amusing comments.” However, she was careful to balance this warmth with “... making sure that I set ground rules from the start” to establish boundaries about respectful classroom culture. Overall, her preference was for gaining work at a small number of schools for consistency. She expressed that “I really enjoy spending a lot of time at certain schools, so that the students and I get to know each other

well and they generally look forward/enjoy having me.” However, she felt excluded from one school community when she was not invited to the whole-school professional learning session held at the end of the school year.

Discussion

This section explores the three research questions in detail and compares similarities and differences amongst participants’ experiences.

Q1: What Do CRTs Report as the Advantages of Their Casual Role?

The participants had different reasons for teaching on a casual basis. For Becky and Chloe, their sayings about casual teaching revealed that this arrangement was a choice rather than a necessity. They both had responsibilities as carers for multiple children, and in the case of Becky, she was also looking after her father and other extended family members. In a study by Uchida, Cavanagh, & Lane (2020), some teachers who returned to the classroom after taking extended leave of absence (e.g., maternity leave) decided to work as CRTs due to the flexible nature of casual teaching. This was true for Chloe, who returned to work as a CRT after having children.

Becky and Chloe also felt that casual teaching was a way to maintain positive mental health while balancing responsibilities beyond teaching. In the case of Chloe, she had already experienced working as a full-time classroom teacher for over a decade before having her first child. She understood the demands of full-time work and knew that it was not a viable long-term option for her due to the responsibilities and workload it entailed. Ava also spoke about her colleagues who had experienced mental health issues and became overwhelmed due to the incessant workloads. Both participants were aware of the additional responsibilities of full-time teaching, such as writing reports and tracking students’ progress through collection and analysis of assessment data.

For Ava, casual teaching was a necessary step to gain experience as a teacher in Australia. She would have preferred working on a full-time or even part-time basis to have consistent work at one school, but casual teaching was an opportunity remain employed within the profession. For Ava, casual teaching acted as a practical way for her to transition into the workforce, especially since she arrived in Australia as a new graduate from the United Kingdom, where she gained her teaching qualification. Colcott (2009) acknowledged the complex and varied reasons why CRTs chose to teach on a casual basis. She surmised that “Some CRTs are actively seeking ongoing employment while others enjoy the flexibility ... of teaching in different settings with different students” (p. 3). For Ava, casual teaching acted as a practical way for her to transition into the workforce, especially since she arrived in Australia as a new graduate from the United Kingdom, where she gained her teaching qualification.

All three participants found that working across different classrooms could advantageous. Becky’s conceptualisation of herself as a “travelling teacher” revealed the ways in which she considered her role as being a legitimate teacher who moves across different schools, rather than teaching at just one. As an early career teacher, Ava also found that observing the practices of other, more experienced teachers was helpful in forming ideas about her future classroom. These findings contrast with previous studies which found that CRTs experienced a profound sense of disconnection and lack of belonging at schools due to their transient nature (Bamberry, 2011). The contradictions may result from the participants

in this study finding schools that facilitated a welcoming atmosphere for CRTs. All three participants were able to find and attach themselves to several schools where they felt included for the most part.

Q2: How Do CRTs Think That the Experience of Casual Teaching Could Be Improved?

There were several ways in which participants desired change for casual teachers. For Becky and Chloe, the need for different accreditation requirements for CRTs was paramount. They both wanted recognition from accrediting bodies that being a CRT was inherently different from working on a full-time basis with consistent routines and teaching the same students. Currently, the accreditation process in Australia is not a unified system but operates differently in each state and territory. In New South Wales, CRTs must collect evidence against all seven of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2017), be observed by an executive staff member (e.g. Assistant Principal, stage leader), and have the compiled documents signed and submitted on their behalf by the principal (New South Wales Department of Education, 2017). Although each state has their own requirements for completion, this process is typical across all states and territories in Australia. These processes involve sustained and consistent support from executive staff, which proved challenging for the three participants in this study, especially since they worked across different schools. Chloe had a consistent half day of work each week at the same school throughout the year, but she still found it difficult to complete the Proficient accreditation processes.

Another aspect that participants identified as an area for improvement was the possibility for more frequent and relevant professional learning sessions. Although all three participants took part in the mandatory first aid training required to work in schools, together they undertook fewer than three separate additional professional learning sessions during the year. Their lack of access to professional learning has been reflected by other CRTs as a wider trend. For example, an Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (2019) report found that 59% of CRTs surveyed were not invited to any professional learning at their regular schools, and 52% had undertaken fewer than 16 hours of professional learning in the previous 12 months. All three participants in this study reported multiple barriers to accessing professional learning opportunities, including lack of time, transportation costs, and having to decline work to attend the sessions. Casual academics in higher education also emphasised their lack of access to institutional support, involvement with teaching in teams, and ongoing employment (Brown, Kelder, Freeman, & Carr, 2013).

Mentoring from more experienced teachers could be strengthened for CRTs to ensure that they are gaining insights from other staff. Although Ava indicated that she was able to learn from other teachers through observing their classrooms and lessons, she was not allocated to a formal mentor by any school she had worked at throughout the year. Systems of formal and ongoing mentoring are crucial support systems, especially for early career teachers (Kelly, Cespedes, Clarà, & Danaher, 2019). Provisions for formal mentoring were also lacking for Becky and Chloe, who were provisionally accredited teachers at the time of this study.

Q3: How Do CRTs' Views About Casual Teaching Change Over One School Year?

All three participants reported growth in confidence over time as they gained experience teaching across different schools and classrooms. This was true for Chloe, an

experienced teacher, as well as for Ava, who had just started casual teaching as a new graduate teacher. No matter their length of experience, casual teaching gave the participants opportunities to hone and enhance their existing skills. As well as changes within themselves as teachers, some participants found that they were able to make changes in students and the school community. Becky found that through her growth in classroom management she was able to build rapport with students who were considered challenging by other teachers and encouraged positive change from them and Cathy was able to facilitate a whole-school change related to sustainability and waste management due to her regular CRT role.

The finding from this study that some participants felt they made meaningful contributions within schools is significant in light of previous studies which focused on the ways in which CRTs feel marginalised and lonely in their work. For example, Lunay and Lock (2006) found that approximately 95% of participants in their study of 20 CRTs in metropolitan Australian primary schools reported feeling alienated as a direct result of their work. The small sample size of the present study may limit the replicability of results. However, the participants in this study provided insights into how maintaining a sense of community and connectedness is possible for CRTs.

Conclusion

The present study applied practice architecture theory to explore the experiences of three CRTs. The diary entries and interviews revealed the ways in which they conceptualised casual teaching, why they chose to become CRTs, and how they demonstrated growth and change over time. A particular advantage of the study was the method of collecting diary entries over an extended period which allowed participants' in-depth insights and reflection to emerge.

The study is limited by the small sample size of participants who volunteered to take part and may not be representative of CRTs in Australian primary schools. Even so, there are several implications resulting from this study. The first is the need to reconsider accreditation processes for CRTs due to their differing needs from full-time classroom teachers, especially their difficulties accessing mentor support and consistent work. Specific Standards, such as "Know the students and how they learn" (Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership, 2019) could be difficult for CRTs to compile evidence when they are engaged in day-to-day work in multiple schools and classrooms. There is also a need for increased professional learning opportunities targeted specifically for CRTs. Although some mandatory training requirements are relevant for all teachers, many CRTs have different needs in terms of lesson planning, assessment, using technological tools and devices, and classroom management than permanent teachers. CRTs alone cannot enact effective change in their professional practice. They must be adequately supported by their colleagues, executive staff (including principals and other leadership staff) and the wider school community as agents of change.

Future research could focus on the growth of CRTs as they progress in their careers, especially early career teachers who start their work on a casual basis. Longitudinal studies on CRTs who go on to gain full-time or part-time positions, or those who remain working on a casual basis, could give insights into wider employment patterns of the education sector.

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