Reappraising the AITSL Professional Engagement Domain: Clarifying Social Capacity Building for School Leaders to Enhance Overall Teacher Job Satisfaction and Career Longevity

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Abstract: The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2018) stipulate what teachers should know and do through each career stage. School leaders are complicit in promoting the Standards are met by all staff, including Professional Engagement (Standards Six and Seven). While the Standards emphasise content and pedagogical capacity building, we contend that teaching is a social enterprise. Although social capacity building is implied in the Professional Engagement domain through terms such as 'collegiality, collaboration and dialogue', we question the degree to which it is understood by school leaders. We ask this in light of influential studies by Waldinger (2010) and Vaillant (1977) which highlight the importance of workplace social connection in terms of job satisfaction and career longevity. Using an Appreciative Inquiry lens, we interviewed a number of positive school leaders about social capacity building among their staff against the Professional Engagement domain. While interviews affirmed many inspiring examples of its application, we also uncovered a degree of uncertainty, lack of clarity and practical difficulties experienced by these exemplary leaders. As per our research approach, we do not suggest that there is any fundamental problem with the Professional Engagement domain per se. However, findings indicate value for AITSL in reappraising this domain in relation to its wording, implications and application. A more explicit emphasis on the social context may in turn help address some of the issues confronting Australia's aging teaching workforce.

Introduction

In 2018, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) revised the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. The Standards were originally developed to regulate the profession, improve teacher quality and streamline teacher mobility (Gray & Lambert, 2019). They provide "a framework which makes clear the knowledge, practice and professional engagement required across teachers' careers", and key to their application is that "teachers can use the standards to recognise their current and developing capabilities, professional aspirations and achievements" (AITSL, 2018, p. 3). The Professional Engagement domain (Standards Six and Seven) states "They [teachers] identify their own learning needs and analyse, evaluate and expand their professional learning both collegially and individually" (p. 5). This domain also defines lead teacher expectations (AITSL stage

four). Lead teachers are expected "to initiate and lead activities that focus on improving educational opportunities … promote creative, innovative thinking among colleagues…[and] inspire colleagues to improve their own professional practice" (AITSL, 2018, p. 8). Appendix 1 presents the Professional Engagement Standards, focus areas and descriptives for lead teachers in full.

Despite some misgivings expressed in relation to the prescriptive nature of the AITSL Standards overall (Gannon, 2012; Gray & Lambert, 2019; Mulcahy, 2011), we contend that the Professional Engagement Standards are valuable in helping articulate personal and professional learning goals for all teachers. However, given that teaching is a social enterprise, we are particularly interested in terms such as 'collegiality, collaboration and dialogue' as they appear within Standards Six and Seven, and how these terms are interpreted and promoted by school leaders. To investigate this, we did not utilise the traditional research path of assuming a problem and proffering solutions, but rather an Appreciative Inquiry analytical lens (Coghlan et al., 2003). We interviewed a number of school leaders with the aim of identifying examples of interpretation and successful application of 'collegiality, collaboration and dialogue', and considered their potential for helping sustain all teachers' job satisfaction and career longevity. Clarification and greater emphasis on 'collegial, collaborative and dialogue' within the Professional Engagement domain could potentially inform the profession and help build social capacity among all teachers. In this, our study was informed by The Harvard Grant Study (Vaillant, 1977; Waldinger, 2010), an 80-year longitudinal study into human happiness and relationships (social connection) especially in terms of job satisfaction and career longevity.

The Harvard Grant Study

The Harvard Grant Study is the world's longest, ongoing longitudinal study into human lived experiences (Vaillant, 1977; Waldinger, 2010). Focussed on male health and aging, the study initially sought to explore specific ways in which men alter themselves and the world around them in order to adapt to life across a range of professions (Vaillant, 1977). Ongoing since 1937, the study has since expanded to include both men and women. While aims and objectives have evolved over time, the main finding has remained constant; that close relationships, not culture, shape our abilities to cope with life's stresses (Vaillant, 1977). Further, Vaillant highlighted the importance of "the quality of sustained relationships," the need for "adaptive mechanisms for dealing with life changes," and notes that human development continues throughout adult life (1977, p. 29). Waldinger (2010) and Vaillant (1977) define 'adaptive mechanisms' as unconscious psychological responses which manifest as strategies people employ to cope with the stress of life. They describe coping strategies as either adaptive (fluid) or problematic (fixed). Adaptive strategies are linked to better relationships, work satisfaction, mental health and subjective well-being while more fixed strategies link to poor relationships and work problems. Vaillant (1977) and Waldinger (2010) highlight the role of social connectedness in building fluid adaptive strategies, and have demonstrated empirical links between social connection, physical health and personality functioning. Malone et al., (2013) reported that adaptive strategies "are linked to better relationships, work satisfaction, mental health, and subjective well-being" (p. 85), and that coping mechanisms such as humour and altruism "diminish the emotional impact of distress, also while keeping those individuals better engaged with reality" (p. 86). Highly fluid adaptive strategies are prominent among those who feel valued in their work and relationships, and generate better stress regulation. Importantly, Vaillant and Waldinger assert that adaptive coping strategies can be learned and developed. Cacioppo and Cacioppo

(2014) posit that fluid adaptive strategies help negate the potentially debilitating effect of isolation both in the workplace and life in general. They note that isolation can impact executive functioning, with long term health outcomes.

In summary, life has been reported as good and fulfilling by Grant Study participants, particularly in their later lives, when 1) they have a network of friends and colleagues in and outside their workplace, 2) within that network of friends are a few upon whom they can depend for support, and 3) they enjoy especially safe relationships, which are protective of participants' physical and mental well-being (Waldinger, 2017).

The Rationale for Our Study

Teaching can be a stressful and demanding occupation (Le Cornu, 2013; Pillay et al., 2005), and Australia is confronting a number of issues in relation to its teaching workforce. Firstly, Australia has recently raised the retirement age from 65 to 67. This takes full effect by July 2023 (Australian Government Department of Human Services, 2018), meaning teachers will be expected to teach for longer. Secondly, TALIS (2018) reports the average age of teachers in Australia to be 42; disturbingly, 30% of Australian teachers are over the age of 50 which means Australia will need to renew three out of ten members of the teaching workforce over the next decade or so. Thirdly, teacher career trajectory studies consistently report disengagement to be a major issue among many older teachers (Day & Gu, 2007; Fessler, 1985; Huberman, 1989; Steffy & Wolfe, 2001; Sykes et al., 1985). Finally, with student numbers rising, and increasing difficulties in retaining older teachers (Admiraal et al., 2019; Meister & Ahrens, 2011; Worth et al., 2018), a teacher shortage would appear imminent. Given that student achievement correlates directly to teacher effectiveness and motivation (Churchill et al., 2019), finding ways to sustain teacher job satisfaction and career longevity will assume increasing importance over time.

Based upon Grant Study findings and the issues facing Australia's teaching profession, we (the research team) pondered the extent to which the Professional Engagement domain, as a public policy document, effectively promotes social capacity building, and how it is interpreted and applied by school leaders. We were immediately drawn to the potential of this domain as a conduit for promoting social connectedness via the terms 'collegiality, collaboration and dialogue' among all teachers to boost job satisfaction and career longevity. Such an examination may ultimately lead to a more robust vision of what is understood by professional learning in the social context within this domain.

However, rather than merely speculate, we set out to identify school leaders who are still passionate and enthusiastic about their work, and to explore how they promote 'collegiality, collaboration and dialogue', as set out in the Professional Engagement focus areas, among their colleagues.

Appreciative Inquiry

For this study, we chose Appreciative Inquiry as our research lens. Coghlan et al., (2003) define Appreciative Inquiry as a "process that enquires into, identifies and further develops the best of what is in organisations in order to create a better future" (p. 5). It derives from the work of Cooperrider in the early 1980s who found more positive cooperation emerged when study participants shared successes rather than failures. Watkins and Mohr (2001) define Appreciative Inquiry as "a philosophy and orientation to change that can fundamentally reshape practice or organizational learning, design and development" (p.

21). Ashford and Patkar (2001) claim that Appreciative Inquiry negates the usual research assumption that organisations are best served by identifying and removing deficits. Rather, organizations improve more effectively through discovery and valuing, envisioning, dialogue and co-constructing the future. Participants focus on their own positive experiences; researchers then identify common elements, and devise statements and action plans for making those experiences happen more often.

According to Banaga (1998), Appreciative Inquiry engages people in creating an organisation's future; problems are inverted into a focus on strengths and success, realities are accepted for what they are, and the focus of inquiry is shifted onto realities that offer sources of vitality. Cooperrider and Whitney (2000) present five foundational principles for Appreciative Inquiry:

- Constructivist – multiple realities exist, and what is known about an organisation and destiny is interwoven
- Simultaneity – because reality evolves, it is possible through inquiry to influence the reality of an organisation
- Poetic – an organization's story is being co-authored continually by its participants
- Anticipatory – if an organization has a positive vision, this will lead to positive actions
- Positive – the more positive the inquiry, the more engaged and excited participants become

We chose this approach because we don't necessarily believe there is a problem with the Professional Engagement domain per se that requires fixing. It is useful and applicable, but its potential may not yet be fully realised in the light of wider studies such as The Grant Study. Specifically, we wanted to search out examples where Standards Six and Seven had been applied in social/collegial contexts, how they had been applied and the resulting impact. We reasoned that positive school leaders, by the very nature of their positivity, would be best placed as partners for the study, and we wanted to 'flatten out' the research approach by having participants share positive experiences, identify commonalities and devise action plans for making those positive experiences more common.

Study Participants

We use the term 'positive school leaders' in this study. This term represents 1) teachers working at level four of the AITSL standards or equivalent, and 2) teachers deemed as 'positive' based upon characteristics described in our previous research (Lowe et al., 2019a). Study participants were identified via a survey previously developed to identify positive teachers and principals (Lowe et al., 2019b). Those who scored highly on the survey and who indicated further interest were invited to participate in a series of individual interviews. Ultimately 11 lead teachers took part, including two principals. Three participants were located in the city of Perth, and eight in regional Western Australia. Six participants were based in secondary schools, three were primary (elementary) schoolteachers and two taught pre-school to year 12. Six teachers were aged in their 40s, three were in their 50s and two in their 60s. Two participants were male and nine were female, including the two principals. From the sample, we were confident that participants represented a reasonable cross-section of gender, location and school type. Ethic approval for this was study was subsequently obtained from Edith Cowan University.

Method
Interview Protocols

Individual semi-structured interviews were undertaken, and interviews lasted between one and two hours each. Questions were framed from The Grant Study (Vaillant, 1977), and participants were provided with the questions in advance (see Appendix 2). Topics revolved around social connectedness and collegiality both inside and outside school, the perceived depth of those connections, the characteristics of those connections, and their impact upon teacher functioning. While we employed set questions, they were not prescriptive; as such, the interviews often took the shape of a narrative approach as interviewees told their stories (Clandinin & Caine, 2013). Interviews were recorded and professionally transcribed, and participants were sent transcripts for checking.

Data Analysis Pathway

From the interview transcripts, data were reviewed through a deductive process of selecting, processing and sifting for like themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Commonalities were then grouped under four generalised categories namely 1) collegiality and social connections in school, 2) social connections outside school, 3) depth and perceived quality of collegiality and social connections, and 4) long term relationships. Specific strategies and events were then grouped under each general category – examples of these strategies include working effectively with colleagues, supervisors, and parents/carers, plus affective listening, reflective thinking, receiving feedback, giving meaningful and constructive feedback, awareness of social nuances in groups, and embracing vulnerability as a core strength in exercising courage in adult growth and development.

From there, we undertook a close scrutiny of the descriptive statements associated with each Standard Six and Seven focus area, as mandated for lead teachers (see Appendix 1). We compared participant interpretations and implementations of collegiality against each standard and focus area statement. A summary of key findings is presented below against each statement, with each participant assigned a pseudonym.

Findings in Relation to AITSL Standard Six
Focus Area 6.1. Identify and Plan Professional Learning Needs

…plan and lead the development of professional learning policies and programs that address the professional learning needs of colleagues and pre-service teachers" (AITSL, p. 20).

Maxine, a school principal, reported facilitating social capacity building in this focus area by asking all staff (including Education Assistants) two questions each year: 1) what is working for you, and 2) what professional learning (PL) do you need? She grouped all PL requests into a composite needs assessment on a board in the staff room as a whole year planner. Maxine stated

> *"Strength based reflections by teachers indicating what they are good at led them to improve their skills exponentially. It took many years to get to this level of trust with staff and it is now part of staff culture."* Further, *"Content of annual PL comes from strategic planning by the Board with the resultant synergy between Board plans and perceived need for PL by staff resulting in team building and culture. Offsite PL that was budgeted by the Board, gives me authority to approve PL for all staff."*

By contrast, Narelle, a lead teacher in a K-12 school, acknowledged *"teachers sometimes need help identifying PL options, but they must decide their own needs eventually",* and *"teachers who are asked by administration what PL they wanted and were then ignored felt treated like children and resentment towards administration by teachers quickly followed."* In her experience *"some PL mandated by administration is so exhausting, especially when it is listening to people read from Power Point and the topic is not relevant, thus robbing teachers of their time."*

In addition, all participants indicated the value of involving older teachers as mentors for early career teachers to gain maximum benefit from PL options, and Rachel undertook PL

"To know and to be better prepared to serve my school community. I also like to feel competent to teach and to serve my colleagues in their own work."

Focus Area 6.2. Engage in Professional Learning and Improve Practice

Initiate collaborative relationships to expand professional learning opportunities … for pre-service teachers (AITSL, p. 20).

In relation to PL improving practice, Kayla noted *"Soft skills need to be part of pre-service teachers' education and training, all in relation to the school culture. The collaborative relationships are part of the schools' responsibility to match pre-service teachers with experienced mentors."*

Narelle emphasised *"collaborative work is needed here since pre-service teachers don't know what to ask for, or what to do. However, pre-service teachers also need to be proactive in seeking help."*

She *"figured out after teaching experience that if kids don't like you they won't learn from you; you find this out quickly if you are working collaboratively with an experienced teacher, including how to effectively win kids over."*

Ray highlighted the importance of a *"mentor to help pre-service teachers work out what they need since, they don't know what they don't know. Pre-service teachers need teaching on the power of collaboration and how to get involved in collaborative work."*

Focus Area 6.3. Engage with Colleagues and Improve Practice

Implement professional dialogue within the school or professional learning network(s) … to improve the educational outcomes of students (AITSL, p. 20).

Ray stressed *"we need to make time for this (collegial dialogue), it gets squeezed with other meetings."*

He described meetings *"with 50% curriculum and pastoral care focus, but the latter focus gets lost in the demands of curriculum…we need to put school time into these meetings about improving collegial practice. However, the best of these meetings happen in passing in a hallway or on the way to duty."* Narelle agreed, noting *"PL days where time is given for no fixed agenda meetings are most valuable, but*

participants must be willing to have these meetings. If meetings are always mandated by administration, they won't necessarily work."
Ray added
"if we trust teachers to do it, they will, especially if we don't have to document everything."
Maxine paid EAs to attend meetings and noted when she gave authority to staff to run meetings, they did. She allowed for
"an organic process of meetings where I don't always get minutes, but as staff pick topics for meetings, I track them for patterns over the years. I see seasons of need accordingly; e.g. NAPLAN focus at various times, etc."
Implementing professional dialogue with colleagues is not exclusively for improving student outcomes. Amy reported:
an occasion of potential conflict with a peer whom I was now managing... As I was firm and engaged with the individual, I won her over. Accordingly, I noted as I negotiated the fine line in relationships with a teacher in order to be an objective and a fair leader, I gained respect and success for ongoing professional dialogue with the individual."
Professional dialogue with colleagues was not necessarily easy. Eve described her experience of leading change in a growing school:
Giving feedback to some teachers about their work can boomerang on you, and on the school generally. This can be the case with some staff who may be rusted on the school culture and who are unable or unwilling to learn and to grow with the school. Developing functional social connections to bring about positive teaching and learning outcomes can take time and a willingness on the part of all players to want to grow and develop in their career. Some teachers were comfortable in the school and they resisted change around growing into a larger school.

Focus Area 6.4. Apply Professional Learning and Improve Student Learning

Advocate, participate in and lead strategies to support high-quality professional learning opportunities for colleagues that focus on improved student learning (AITSL, p. 21).
In terms of strategies, Maxine
"allows two full days before school year starts just for teachers to prepare their rooms and all other work they need to do, then another two days for school wide PL. This is being responsive to staff loads and acknowledging their team work accordingly."
This was paid work supported by the School Board. Further:
"staff need to be taught how to ask for what they want and how to communicate in meetings. This tends to ensure teachers want to come to meetings."
In Narelle's words
"When teachers have responsibility and authority to plan, they will, and this builds a culture in the school of taking personal responsibility for professional behaviour. However, this all takes time. People slowly feel empowered and engaged teachers are motivated."
Maxine, Joan and Narelle agreed that finding time for staff PL is the angst for principals and leaders. Online PL can be effective, but as Narelle stated,
"it lacks the human touch for discussion, plus managers of on-line PL can see when you log in and out of these sessions and they can judge you accordingly.

PL can be really time consuming, so the question is how to make it attractive for teachers."

Findings in Relation to AITSL Standard Seven
Focus Area 7.1. Meet Professional Ethics and Responsibilities

Model exemplary ethical behaviour and exercise informed judgements in all professional dealings with students, colleagues and the community (AITSL, p. 22).

Joan, Eve and Rachel queried what professional engagement really meant for this Standard. Eve pointed out

"PC is changing behaviour radically and it can be really tough for all teachers to negotiate in a classroom. There can be levels of professional behaviour and social connections where a clash of values can sometimes occur." Rachel asked, *"What is professional conduct among teachers in relation to social connections? The #Metoo movement is adding to reluctance on behalf of some teachers to be transparent with one another."*

In other instances in Rachel's experience

"collegiality can be seen by some as exclusivity, which seems to be PC gone mad. Some teachers saw our attempts at collegial process as excluding others."

Rachel added:

Veteran teachers can act as mediators in difficult situations, providing they have sanctioned authority with that responsibility. However, not all are trained in some conflict situations and students with social awareness of their rights is often tough to negotiate for teachers.

As an experienced veteran teacher Mary experienced this clash in her current school where

"one teacher confronted me by a photocopier and declared, 'don't think you are coming here with your ideas from your former school – we do things our way here.'"

Joan believed that classroom teachers were not trained for potential conflict situations:

"Scripted conversations for teachers to follow in difficult relationship issues can help, especially for beginning teachers. Modelling exemplary ethical behaviour in our current society is a great challenge for leadership and all teachers."

Focus Area 7.2. Comply with Legislative, Administrative and Organisational Requirements

Initiate, develop and implement relevant processes to support colleagues' compliance… (AITSL, p. 22).

Joan stated:

Policy development is a process that needs to be played out over time in developing the policy; it is a dynamic process that cannot be mandated without consulting teachers. Veteran teachers have experience that HR and others need to seek out when developing policy…top down policy making happens because of lack of time, but these policies can quickly become redundant if they hinder effective practice by teachers.

In Rachel's experience:

The Board usually sets policies with help from IT and HR. This can result in policies that are unworkable in the classroom; they must consult teachers in the

process of policy development. Management can take reactive approaches rather than consulting and collaborating with teachers.

In terms of compliance, Maxine described her role as:

To gather the relevant information and then to go to the appropriate network of people with the information to seek their opinion. After all this I can step out with some confidence in my action. Taking this time and process is edgy, but getting the information I need, plus working with groups is the energy of leadership for me.

Convincing staff in relation to compliance with change and school administrative matters is difficult. Eve noted

"There is resistance to change generally, and specifically where some staff refuse to adapt to what the school administration and management requires. Much of this stems from the changing demands of accountability in schools."

In Narelle's words

"Negative colleagues are a challenge, but I sought ways to encourage and affirm them. I was always looking for the gaps in their lives."

The analogy of "gaps in their lives" stems from past experiences with an uncle who taught Narelle to drive:

"He advised if I got into a skid and I was going to crash into a tree, 'don't hit the tree; drive for the gaps between trees instead.'"

This has been helpful for Narelle in negotiating some colleagues through the change process. Ray described leading change as:

Tinkering to fine tune, rather than the mass market of education where the speed of change is tough on staff. Staff at my school want to learn; they want to develop their own teaching skills; they are committed to change, but at a pace that reflects a commitment to be life-long learners. This process is definitely led and modelled by the principal.

Focus Area 7.3. Engage with Parents/Carers

Identify, initiate and build on opportunities that engage parents/carers in both the progress of their children's learning and in the educational priorities of the school (AITSL, p. 22).

Joan noted

"Parents struggle with this too, but the principal can help parents engage with teachers to seek effective and workable school policies", while Rachel stated *"understanding policy and training accordingly for beginning teachers in relating to parents in parent/teacher interviews should be introduced in their teacher training and education. Schools can also offer parents coaching in encouraging the teacher to listen to them."*

Rachel also proposed:

Have a script when dealing with parents, including how to get them back to the issue. My school has script and phrases written down and posted by phones in order that teachers can view this if they are feeling lost or uneasy in the conversation. We need to teach teachers how to listen when feeling threatened.

Kayla leads an intense Learning Centre with 14 EAs and students with extreme learning needs:

> *"this work can become isolating and seeing kids' progress is slow but rewarding when it happens. Therefore, growing the team of EAs and two teachers to engage with parents and other carers has been most rewarding."*

Developing these relationships with parents is not always easy. Tanya recalled experiences with difficult parents from her Deputy Head role in the UK. Initially, she became fearful of every decision she had to make;

> *"fear of another email, phone call, letter, parent seeking a meeting…contact with parents in some UK schools is more of a cultural and elitist thing."*

Her experience is a sobering reminder that engaging with parents/carers can be difficult.

Narelle proffered a different perspective based upon her years of experience in rural and remote schools where students came to school hungry and tired. She established a breakfast program and many students were allowed to sleep at their desks for much of the morning program. Aids would wash student's clothes and return them clean at the end of the day. Narelle attributed much of her positive outlook to the struggles children in remote areas faced compared with her current situation.

Focus Area 7.4. Engage with Professional Teaching Networks and Broader Communities

Take a leadership role in professional and community networks and support the involvement of colleagues in external learning opportunities (AITSL, p. 22)

As country-based teachers, Joan, Eve and Rachel emphasised 1) the need for networking days for regional areas, including linking professional associations and networks as it is a challenge for these teachers to attend PL sessions, 2) slashing the cost of PL sessions and 3) mandating key PL for schools within regional and city networks.

Leadership in broader community engagement was a passion for Joan who sought membership of Rotary as a good way to consolidate community connections into stronger relationships. She stated:

> *Joining local Rotary had great potential for linking my school with service clubs in the community. I subsequently ran for election in my local Shire Council since I firmly believe in community and schools being partners as joint venturers in education.*

With respect to leadership among staff, David noted,

> *"We must provide focus and direction to get buy-in from teachers and community. Further, in leadership we must have a vested interest in team for reciprocal respect and for them to gain the most from appropriate PL."*

David described his school as

> *"a large corporation where I see the following leadership traits and qualities among colleagues demonstrated: Perseverance, Communication, Tough conversations."*

Discussion

The use of an Appreciative Inquiry lens proved valuable for this study as participants enthusiastically described what worked for them, rather than dwell on deficits. While our research focused upon positive experiences in relation to the Professional Engagement domain, it became clear that participants need help beyond indications of the level of knowledge required for engaging with the Standards. It is this focus upon process and the

transformative nature of engagement where school leaders may need support. They know engagement is required but feel a degree of angst about how to manage effective engagement over time. In this, we note that seven focus area statements cover knowledge and engagement, but only one, 6.4, is concerned with applications of knowledge to engagement.

In relation to Standard Six, Maxine provided invaluable insights into how she encouraged her staff to identify their PL needs through reflective practice, to identify their strengths and enhance their expertise. Inferences of autonomy and trust in her approach complimented Narelle's observation that top-down, mandated PL may not always be considered relevant or stimulating by staff. Further, all participants stressed collaboration as the most effective way to support pre-service teachers in identifying PL most relevant to their particular circumstance. It became apparent however that focus area 6.3 makes the most demands on teachers' capacity to develop and benefit from positive relationships with colleagues. Accordingly, a key question concerning PL would be, 'to what extent is social capacity building explicit to PL in Standard Six?' Participants noted that effective social capacity building takes time to implement. Outcomes were more powerful when teachers were trusted with the responsibility and authority to work collaboratively to improve educational outcomes and working relationships. In addition, enhanced social capacity lead to effective conflict management and resolution, especially where some teachers were resistant to change. However, participants revealed the importance for school leaders in knowing how to encourage staff in the process of applying PL. Allowing staff effective planning and preparation time reportedly helped build a positive school culture. Empowerment of staff and trust in them to act professionally was a recurring theme in relation to Standard Six PL.

For Standard Seven, participants queried the call to 'model exemplary ethical behaviour', citing rapid and radical societal changes manifest in the attitudes of students as challenges to established ethical norms. They also noted the potential for ideological clashes in relation to ethical behaviour with current social values and culture in schools. Participants acknowledged that training was required in how to act and negotiate in the state of social flux in schools. In addition, compliance in the light of mandated change was described as a huge challenge. However, our participants proffered engaging teachers in policy development and honouring their ideas as potential solutions. They also advocated the need for time to work through the emotional as well as logistical elements associated with educational change, albeit difficult when change can be frequent and pervasive.

Engaging successfully with parents/carers emerged as a contentious but not impossible, area. Getting this process right was a high priority for our participants, but this cannot be addressed in isolation. Social phenomena such as poverty, remote schools, hunger, lack of resources, family breakdown, and inequity of resources impinge upon schools and teachers in their efforts to provide the best possible education for all children.

The two themes to emerge specific to focus area 7.4 encompassed external PL and engagement with local communities as potential support networks for schools. School leadership was critical in ensuring access to quality PL for teachers in regional and remote areas, and it was equally valuable for school leaders to engage with the local community to foster positive educational, social and cultural outcomes. As for Standard Six, it could be asked the extent to which schools understand and are able to support the development in staff of the social/relationship skills as described in The Grant Study to help them adapt to changing circumstances and enhance job satisfaction.

Recommendations for Practice

Based upon participant responses, we offer the following recommendations in relation to the Professional Engagement domain:

Firstly, we recommend the insertion of explicit reference to social capacity building PL within the Professional Engagement domain of the AITSL Standards policy document, especially for lead teachers. Explicit reference would empower school leaders to lead PL or to seek out facilitators who can deliver such modules on a needs basis, in consultation with their staff. Based upon our study, social capacity building PL could include: listening to feedback, reflective listening and reflective practice, negotiating tough conversations, giving focussed feedback which acknowledges progress and improvement, and leading group discussions, including meetings, among others.

A second recommendation is that AITSL revisit wording of the Professional Engagement domain and its focus areas to embed an equal focus between PL for knowledge and pedagogy, and social capacity building to promote collegiality, collaboration and dialogue among teachers at all levels. Teachers today are equally expected to deliver a comprehensive curriculum, and to manage students, parents/carers and fellow teachers who can be openly hostile or indifferent to their efforts. Having a stronger social skill set for all teachers from graduate level to negotiate this emotionally laden pathway is essential, and the participants in our study have been able to adapt their practice to maintain job satisfaction accordingly.

Our third recommendation is that AITSL and other stakeholders recognise that current social challenges extend beyond the Standards themselves. As we examined participant responses, we became increasingly aware of the scale and depth of issues and challenges facing our school leaders. However, as our study demonstrates, building social capacity among teachers is possible where recognition of its importance exists, and leaders encourage it. Building social capacity takes time and effort, and tackling it requires recognition and understanding from AITSL and government that there are no quick fixes or easy solutions. Sustained and widespread social capacity building goes beyond the ability of isolated school leaders, such as the exemplary participants in our study, and there is often disagreement about the nature of the problems and the best way to tackle them. Usually, part of the solution involves the active participation of all stakeholders. Accordingly, we urge AITSL to assume a leadership role in relation to teacher social capacity building, and proactively lead change in terms of reworking the Professional Engagement domain and supporting literature.

Our fourth recommendation concerns revisiting Initial Teacher Education (ITE) selection criteria in an effort to attract candidates most likely to succeed as teachers, not just based upon academic ability and/or delivery skills but also on their social capacity. There is no simple solution to this particular problem, but consideration of the lived experiences of our participants may offer some insights into desirable qualities likely to ensure collegiality, collaboration and dialogue. Further, we recommend the broadening of ITE courses to include social capacity building that ensure future graduates are best prepared to enjoy job satisfaction and career longevity. This may not necessarily involve the creation of new courses or units but simply a subtle realignment of existing tertiary offerings.

Conclusion

Australia is confronting a series of emerging issues surrounding its teachers including expectations that teachers will work for longer, an aging teaching workforce, increasing student numbers and issues surrounding disengagement among many older teachers. In this,

discussions surrounding job satisfaction and career longevity are not new; much has been written about why teachers, especially early career teachers, leave the profession (Ewing & Manuel, 2005; Le Cornu, 2013; McKinnon, 2016). Career longevity will assume increasing importance in the future as we confront an aging teaching workforce and an increase in the retirement age. The Harvard Grant Study, while encompassing all professions, offers us valuable insights into the value of social connectedness in building social capacity by encouraging and developing adaptive coping strategies for job satisfaction and career longevity, as well as mental health and subjective well-being (Vaillant, 1977; Waldinger, 2010).

The Appreciative Inquiry approach underpinning this study has allowed positive school leaders to describe a range of adaptive strategies they employ surrounding their interpretations of 'collegiality, collaboration and dialogue', as outlined in the Professional Engagement domain. These strategies have in turn built staff morale by encouraging trust and autonomy, social skills which Vaillant (1977) and Waldinger (2010) contend can be learned, albeit over time. Our study has also inadvertently described issues surrounding the debilitating impact of isolation which occurs when teachers are not equipped to deal with difficult social contexts such as difficult parents/fellow staff, the rapid pace of educational change or disempowerment. Our participants have consciously endeavoured to build social capacity among their staff even though it was evident they needed help and direction in terms of the knowledge required and the process of implementation. We fear that the success of our participants may be the exception rather than the rule.

AITSL is uniquely placed to address and lead on teachers' social capacity building through a reappraisal of the Professional Engagement domain, to the long-term benefit of teachers as well as students, as student outcomes are influenced by teacher quality (Churchill et al., 2019). The AITSL Standards represent a public statement of who teachers are and what they are expected to do; we contend that enabling conditions for social capacity building for all staff need to be explicitly built into Standards Six and Seven so school leaders can lead in its development, and all teachers understand its value and benefit accordingly. By acknowledging the findings of wider studies such as The Harvard Grant Study, and clarifying the social capacity building component of the Professional Engagement domain, AITSL is then implicitly acknowledging the contribution of positive school leaders such as our participants in building their unique realities surrounding social connectedness among colleagues. We contend that AITSL has the perfect opportunity to co-author with our participants and create the future, to the benefit of all Australian teachers. As one of the fundamental principles of Appreciative Inquiry, an organisation's vitality is linked, and success constructed, through the practical experiences of its members.

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Appendix 1 – AITSL Professional Engagement Domain, Focus Areas and Descriptives for Lead Teachers (2018)

PROFESSIONAL ENGAGEMENT
STANDARD 6: ENGAGE IN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR LEAD TEACHERS

6.1	Identify and plan professional learning needs	Use comprehensive knowledge of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers to plan and lead the development of professional learning policies and programs that address the professional learning needs of colleagues and pre-service teachers.
6.2	Engage in professional learning and improve practice	Initiate collaborative relationships to expand professional learning opportunities, engage in research and provide quality opportunities and placements for pre-service teachers.
6.3	Engage with colleagues and improve practice	Implement professional dialogue within the school of professional learning network(s) that is informed by feedback, analysis of current research and practice to improve the educational outcomes of students.
6.4	Apply professional learning and improve student learning	Advocate, participate in and lead strategies to support high-quality professional learning opportunities for colleagues that focus on improved student learning.

STANDARD 7: ENGAGE PROFESSIONALLY WITH COLLEAGUES, PARENTS/CARERS AND THE COMMUNITY

7.1	Meet professional ethics and responsibilities	Model exemplary ethical behaviour and exercise informed judgements in all professional dealings with students, colleagues and the community.
7.2	Comply with legislative, administrative and organisational requirements	Initiate, develop and implement relevant policies and processes to support colleagues' compliance with and understanding of existing and new legislative, administrative, organisational and professional responsibilities.
7.3	Engage with the parents/carers	Identify, initiate and build on opportunities that engage parents/carers in both the progress of their children's learning and in the educational priorities of the school.
7.4	Engage with professional teaching networks and broader communities	Take a leadership role in professional and community networks and support the involvement of colleagues in external learning opportunities.

Appendix 2 – Interview questions

Social Connections within your school
1) Tell me about the social group connections you have encouraged and developed in your school
2) Are there *specific ways* in which social connections in schools have impinged, positively or negatively upon your own teaching career? The school as a whole?
3) What about social groups within your school – how important are they to overall staff wellbeing?

Qualities and depth of your Social Connections
4) As you reflect upon all your own social connections, do you identify specific people, or a smaller 'close circle' of friends and can you identify characteristics of these people that are significant to you?

Family and Heroes
5) How important have family/spouse/special heroes been to your success in teaching?

AITSL Professional Engagement domain

6)	How comfortable are you in your leadership role – satisfaction? Why?
7)	What do you think is meant by 'collegiality, collaboration and dialogue' as set out in AITSL Standards Six and Seven?
8)	How do you promote 'collegiality, collaboration and dialogue' among your staff?
9)	How successful do you feel you have been in this area?

Health and Social Connections

10)	For the period of your teaching career how do you believe teaching has impacted upon your overall physical health? How have you managed that?
11)	Has teaching impacted upon your emotional health? If so, were there people within your social connections who were important to you then? How?
12)	What impact do you think the promotion of collegiality, collaboration and dialogue has on the general health of your staff?

Finally

13)	As you reflect upon your teaching career to date, what do you believe are the most effective coping strategies any teacher can adopt?
14)	What advice would you give yourself if you were starting your teaching career this year?