

Research as rejuvenation

Carl Johnson¹

¹ CQUniversity

My career as a secondary science teacher began in the UK in 2002. I taught in two colleges until I emigrated in 2014 to teach senior science in a regional Queensland college. At the beginning of my career, I anticipated I might achieve promotion but nevertheless saw classroom teaching as a lifelong vocation. To find myself considering exiting the profession in 2018 was confronting, confusing and chilling. I was aware of the global supply and demand issues facing the profession but considered attrition as an exclusively early career phenomenon. Furthermore, I was unaware of the significance of experienced shortage subject teacher recruitment and retention in a regional Queensland context. Limited research exists on the attrition of experienced subject shortage teachers, but the research suggests attrition is a long-term process and that professional wellbeing may be a significant contributing factor. My research explores the motivations behind the exit decision of a mid-career experienced regional teacher in a subject shortage area, with the intention of reversing that decision. I use an autoethnographic methodology as a professional development tool to explore my experiences in two different school settings (UK and QLD). Analysing my situation through an autoethnographic lens, and then looking to current research to develop a deeper understanding, has allowed me to objectively examine phenomena I was emotionally invested in. I became aware that my situation was not simply career fatigue but a result of unfulfillment due to my vastly different professional development experiences. Early findings suggest there is a strong relationship between my experiences of effective performance management, career development and professional wellbeing. Although wellbeing is a concept increasingly discussed in a school context, the emphasis is on student wellbeing and mental health rather than teacher wellbeing. My own understanding of professional wellbeing, and its impact on workforce welfare, has been challenged and reframed as a result of using autoethnography as a professional development tool. The autoethnographic process triggered an unexpected transformation in attitude and professional wellbeing and allowed me to develop my own professional development pathway. I will demonstrate how autoethnography has worthiness as a professional development tool in its own right. Furthermore, it is anticipated that the findings of this research will provide a unique perspective into the developing field of research regarding experienced teacher attrition and retention.