

# Dr John Topliss

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Western Australia

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Topliss, J. (2017). Mentoring beginning teachers in Catholic schools in Western Australia: An exploratory study (Doctor of Philosophy (College of Education)). University of Notre Dame Australia. <https://researchonline.nd.edu.au/theses/161>

To Whom it may concern.

The submission centres around my responses to two of the AITSL Focus questions that arose from my 2017 PhD study and related to these questions:-

1. How is the national teacher registration framework working across Australia?
4. How does teacher registration support entry into the teaching profession?

I recommend that a systematic or sector approach for the implementation of a detailed Induction/ Mentor & Coaching framework/program may improve the induction of an ECT (Early Career Teacher). I found nearly half of ECTs in the study received minimal feedback from mentors and or/principals regarding the prospect of ongoing permanency. Although some of the ECTs received feedback in the Proficient Stage of the Australian Professional Standards of Teaching as a Key Performance Indicator for their ongoing employment, 54% of Beginning Teachers reported no such feedback. The quality of feedback provided to an ECT by either a leader or mentor in a school, may significantly influence the time taken for them to progress from provisional to proficient teacher and may affect their permanency in the teaching profession. There was also some significant contextual issues reported, regarding differences in an ECTs perceived teaching confidence when teaching in either a City and Country school.

A chief finding was that the guarantee of a mentor does not necessarily alleviate every problem faced by an ECT. However, the attributes of a mentor may significantly assist or hinder the aspirations of an ECT. It was also found that the regular feedback provided to Post-Internship (Pre-Service) teachers became more informal as an ECTs' careers progressed. Leaders, or in some cases their delegated mentor, may provide feedback for a variety of reasons such as to:

- A) evaluate the effectiveness of an ECT as part of a School Improvement process, or,
- B) provide feedback to an ECT on their achievement of certain Standards that can assist them with: individual goal-setting for self-improvement, or, to achieve full teacher registration and/or gain permanency.

The fact that the feedback provided is in most cases not in a standard format, means some ECTs could interpret the feedback provided indifferently and this potential creates uncertainty. The recommendation of a standard feedback format to assist mentors/leaders in assessing ECTs in the achievement of Standards would be highly recommended.

Some other issues affecting ECT permanency i.e.: filling in for maternity/ paternity leave and other short-term absences, need to be further explored as they have the potential to influence the status of ECTs as registered teachers i.e. If some ECTs are constantly having to accept short-term temporary contracts in a range of different schools, potentially this may affect their own well-being and long-term perception of their future in the profession. I have included below the abstract and above a link to my PhD, which provides a more detailed elaboration of the findings and issues pertaining to Beginning Teachers.

## **Abstract**

The study identified and explored the mentoring experiences in the transition from graduate to Early Career Teacher (ECT) in selected Catholic primary and secondary schools in Western Australia. The research addressed a significant deficit, as presently the lack of a system-wide framework for the mentoring of ECTs, the cessation of the current ECT program and the limited training of mentors, has resulted in less than ideal mentoring experiences for ECTs. The study examined the perceptions of ECTs in the transition from graduate to Beginning Teacher and

involved three distinct yet inter-related phases that explored the mentoring experience. The first phase sought the expectations of mentoring of a small group of final year, Primary Education students from a Catholic University in Western Australia. The second phase, the Beginning Teachers' phase, was conducted with a group over their first three terms of teaching and examined their experiences of mentoring. In the final phase, the perceptions of Catholic primary principals were sought regarding the place and logistics of mentoring. These phases were then synthesised to provide a clearer picture of mentoring in the Catholic Education system.

The data collection methods involved both a survey questionnaire and focus group input. Descriptive statistical analysis was undertaken for each phase of the study for interpreting survey data from Post-Internship (Pre-Service) teachers, Beginning Teachers and principals. Such an approach helped to determine the numerical occurrence of concept/theme descriptors in relation to answering each of the research questions. For the purpose of addressing the research questions, focus group qualitative data were garnered via the use of both open-ended and closed questioning techniques, which were then audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. Data was interpreted using a Mixed Methods convergence design. A chief finding was that the guarantee of a mentor does not necessarily alleviate every problem faced by an ECT. However, the attributes of a mentor may significantly assist or hinder the aspirations of an ECT. It was also found that the regular feedback provided to Post-Internship (Pre-Service) teachers became more informal as an ECTs' careers progressed. The importance of feedback to the vocation of both Post-Internship (Pre-Service) teachers and ECTs indicated that further investigation was specifically required in the Religious Education Learning Area.

Significantly, nearly half of ECTs received minimal feedback from mentors and or/principals regarding the prospect of ongoing permanency. Although some of the ECTs received feedback in the Proficient Stage of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) Standards as a Key Performance Indicator for their ongoing employment, 54% of Beginning Teachers reported no such feedback. The lack of certainty about their future role in the workplace impacted the relationship some ECTs had with their mentor and/or principal.

Encouragingly, the majority of principals recognised the importance of mentoring by offering support for the instigation of a system-wide mentoring framework.

On the basis of these findings, principles upon which a new mentoring framework might be developed are proposed. These principles might benefit principals, mentors and ECTs, through the introduction of strategies such as school and system-based mentoring coordinators.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Joplin". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial 'J'.