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Teacher morale: More complex than we think?

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Abstract

The literature suggests that teacher morale is at an all time low in Australia (Hicks 2003; Smyth 2001) with teachers feeling undervalued, frustrated, unappreciated and demoralized (Smyth 2001; Senate Employment, Education and Training References Committee, *A Class Act* 1998). In this paper the author utilizes the data gathered in a recent study into teaching excellence awards (Mackenzie 2004) as the medium to explore and discuss the issue of teacher morale and to provide some tentative suggestions for improving morale as proposed by the study participants. If we accept a reciprocal relationship between teacher morale and student learning (Ramsey 2000; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) 2000), students in some schools may not be getting the best possible value from teachers affected by low morale. Participants in the Mackenzie (2004) study agreed that morale was generally lower than in previous times, although many suggested that morale was positive in their own schools. This suggests that morale may be more complex than has been previously understood, with three levels of morale operating concurrently for teachers, a concept which is explored in this paper.

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Introduction

A decline over the past 30 years in the morale of teachers is identified within the literature, along with recognition of teaching having become an increasingly more demanding profession. The drop in morale has been accompanied by a shift in public attitude towards education and a suggestion that education in Australia is losing its place on 'the international comparison ladder' (Kelly 2000, p.9). The assumption that 'education is not fulfilling its potential' (OECD 2000, p.31) has led to a focus on 'acceptable end products' (Smyth 2001, p.6), state-wide testing and performance appraisal techniques aimed at 'value for money' (Smyth 2001, p.6). This has occurred at a time when Australian politicians appear to view education as a low priority (Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE) 2004, p.1). Numerous causes for low teacher morale have been suggested: poor status in the community; poor salaries (relative to other professions); poor student behaviour; excessive workload; poor leadership; poor working conditions; and increasing government accountability measures. The data informing this paper provide both support and challenge to the idea that morale is low and offer some suggestions for ways to improve morale.

Background

Australia's teachers are highly qualified and older than at any time in the past 40 years with the median age of teachers in Australia having increased from 34 to 43 years over the 15 years to 2001. Female teachers outnumber male teachers by 2:1 overall, and of the teachers in the 21 to 30 years age bracket, women outnumber men by 3:1 (Australian College of Education (ACE) 2001). Most Australian teachers (88.2 percent) are permanently employed on a full-time or part-time basis by education authorities, either State/Territory government authorities or Catholic diocesan

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authorities (Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) 2003, p.75).

Beginning teacher salaries in Australia compare favourably with most other professions; however, teaching becomes less financially attractive the longer a teacher remains in the profession (DEST 2003, p.176) with the majority of teachers reaching the top of their salary scale within ten years. Promotional opportunities are limited, in most cases lead out of the classroom and favour males (*A Class Act* 1998, p.iii).

The changing role of the teacher

As societies become more complex, so do the challenges they face (DEST 2003, p.3).

Teaching is a socially responsible occupation which is highly accountable and bureaucratic, demanding intellectually, emotionally and physically, (Sachs 2003, p.85), intensive and unrelenting. Although employed to *teach*, teachers are engaged in a wide variety of tasks which are additional to face-to-face teaching and appear to be demanding more and more of teachers. These extra duties include: curriculum design and development; school planning; marketing (mostly private school teachers); community relations; information technology; workplace health and safety; resource management; student welfare; along with playground and sports supervision (ACE 2001). Teachers are also finding it increasingly difficult to meet the needs of students with a wider range of abilities resulting from inclusion policies that have seen the number of students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms in NSW schools go from '14,488 in 1988 to 35,256 in 2002' (Buckingham 2003, p.11).

While the demands upon teachers have increased, there has been little change in patterns of employment, compensation and career advancement of teachers (J.A.

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Kelly 2000). Intensification of the teaching role (Sachs 2003; Smyth 2001) and deterioration of working conditions are recognised in the literature (*A Class Act* 1998). However, while it is suggested by some that workload is a major contributor to stress and low morale (*A Class Act* 1998) others disagree, claiming that teachers are able to handle the extra pressures and increased workload (Day 2000; Eltis 1997). Sachs (2003) argues that teachers are generally able to maintain a focus 'upon the best interests of their students, even if the system appears to let them down' (p.85). Perhaps this is the reason why systems do not see a need to address the crisis in teacher morale.

The status of the teaching profession

Status is broadly defined as: 'one's position in society'; 'one's value and importance in the eyes of the world'; but more narrowly 'one's legal or professional standing within a group' with different societies awarding status to different groups: 'hunters, fighters, ancient families, priests, knights, fecund women' (de Botton 2004, p.3). High status 'is thought by many (but freely admitted by few) to be one of the finest of earthly goods' (de Botton 2004, p.3).

The status of the teaching profession in Australia is currently lower than that of the major professions (Hoyle 2001) although Crowther (2003) claims that the teaching profession has been 'under a cloud' for two generations. The State Senate Employment, Education and Training References Committee (*A Class Act* 1998) suggest that a 'major contributor to the low status of teachers is the community's lack of understanding of just what is involved in teaching' (p.26) which seems in contrast with the idea that everyone knows what teachers do because they have all been to

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school. According to the Ministerial Advisory Council on the Quality of Teaching (MACQT) report into the *Standing of Teachers and Teaching* (1997), the actual working conditions under which teachers and students are expected to operate are rarely seen on television, even on news/current events coverage (p.2.) A lack of personal knowledge about schools and teachers, leads people to form their opinions based on fictional media representations (Swetman 1992, p.30) or media, which focuses on newsworthy problems such as industrial stoppages rather than the routines of daily teaching (MACQT 1997, p.1).

The *Standing of Teachers and Teaching* report (MACQT 1997) also identified recognition amongst school-aged students of a mismatch between the status of the teaching profession in the community and its contribution to that community (p.3).

The *Australia's Teachers: Australia's Future* report (DEST 2003) claims that 'many potentially fine teachers are dissuaded from joining the [teaching] profession by perceptions of low status and relatively poor remuneration' (p.30) advising the need for public awareness and appreciation of teaching as a profession to be raised (p.23).

Hoyle (2001) argues, however, that the size of the profession, and the fact that the cost of salaries is met largely from the public purse, limits the average level of salary which teachers are paid. 'This affects prestige directly insofar as level of salary is a factor in determining the prestige of a profession' (Hoyle 2001, p.141).

The lowering of the status of teaching and other 'people work' is, according to Scott (2001) the result of the values associated with 'economic rationalism', that is, of 'individualism, materialism and the search for personal security and well-being over more social aims' (p.2). The report, *A Class Act* (1998) made the claim that status and

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power were ‘usually economic’ and that the status and power of teachers was reduced because teachers work with children and ‘children have no economic or political power’ (p.3). This view is supported by Hoyle (2001) who adds that the large percentage of female teachers, the lack of professional mystique (most members of the population have had lengthy, required exposure to teachers) and the fact that a teacher’s clients are children who they face on a daily basis in large groups as a matter of routine, all count against teaching in terms of status (p.141). The public persists in believing that anyone can teach, with teaching regarded in the community as ‘*women’s work* – a half-step above child care’ (Johnson 2000, p.21), with long holidays and short working days. Crowther (2001) also claims that by the early 1990s curricula, administration and policy processes had become more important than teaching, thereby affecting the political influence, public image and ascribed status of teaching.

A need for initiatives to attract and retain teachers (DEST 2003) highlights a need to improve the status of the profession in order to avoid a teacher shortage as an ageing teaching force retires and must be replaced (DEST 2003). Although Crowther (2003) maintains that teaching ‘is a profession whose time has come’ (p.2), the data examined in the study informing this paper indicate that teachers are not so confident.

What does the literature say about morale?

Morale: ‘moral or mental condition with respect to cheerfulness, confidence, zeal’ (Macquarie Dictionary 3rd Ed).

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When teacher morale in a school is high and the school environment is healthy, teachers feel good about themselves, each other and their teaching, which in turn impacts on student morale and achievement (OECD 2000; Young 1998).

Alternatively, low morale for teachers can lead to decreased productivity and a detachment from the teacher role, colleagues and students. Teachers with low morale may begin to 'lose heart', take increased sick leave, look for alternative employment and develop a cynical approach to students, teaching and the education system (Independent Education Union (IEU) 1996, p.2). People with low morale tend to see obstacles as potential opportunities for failure, while people with high morale see obstacles as challenges which need to be solved (Ramsey 2000, p.15).

While Young (1998) claims that morale is often influenced more by outside factors than internal ones (p.11) Rogers (1992) identifies both internal and external factors as influencing morale, highlighting 'pace of bureaucratic change; discipline and management concerns; staff and staff relations; time and workload pressures' (p.v) as the most common stressors for teachers. Verdugo, Greenberg, Henderson, Uribe & Schneider (1997) claim that 'the closer schools come to developing a community, the greater will be teachers' job satisfaction' (p.55) while Lumsden (1998) suggests that it may be impossible to separate the issues of school culture, leadership and teacher morale arguing that although individuals can take steps to maintain their professional satisfaction and morale, they must also be 'nurtured, supported and valued by the broader school community' (p.5). Many teachers in Australia perceive that the government has retreated from education with constant 'brawls between Commonwealth and State Ministers over funding' (A *Class Act* 1998, p.6) and that this contributes to what has become a 'serious crisis of morale amongst teachers' (A

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Class Act 1998, p.6). Too many young teachers who initially begin their career with enthusiasm and positive expectations are looking for a change in direction after only 3-5 years (Hicks 2003), while experienced teachers ‘suffering from low morale are retiring early or leaving the profession to seek other employment’ (O’Donnell 2001, p. 1).

The study

An examination of the intent, process and impact of extrinsic teaching excellence awards on award recipients and their non-recipient colleagues (Mackenzie 2004) provided the opportunity for reviewing literature and gathering data related to teacher morale and the status of the teaching profession. Organisational and sociological paradigms provided the underpinning theory for the study in terms of the methodology adopted and the theoretical framework employed in the interpretive phase of the study. Teaching in Australia in the early 21st century, and more specifically the NSW Department of Education and Training (NSW DET), formed the context for the study. Literature informing the study at a theoretical level included: ‘organisational culture’, ‘schools as learning organisations’, ‘change and education’ and ‘the teacher as a unique individual’. Teachers do not operate in isolation; rather they work within social and organisational contexts at school, department, state, nation and global levels and are, therefore, influenced to varying degrees by each and all of these contexts. Literature pertaining to the role of the teacher, teacher working conditions, teacher supply and demand, accreditation, teacher quality and current levels of teacher satisfaction provided a backdrop to the study.

Methodology

The study was undertaken within an interpretive/constructivist paradigm with participants invited to consider the status of the teaching profession, teacher morale in current times and extrinsic teaching excellence awards. Data were collected in two stages, approximately one year apart, from two groups of teachers and executive members (total sample = 101 participants) and triangulated: data collection tools (questionnaires, interviews and participant observation); time frame (pilot and major studies a year apart); sources (award recipients and non-recipients) and data collection methods (qualitative and quantitative). Questionnaires combined attitude statements with open-ended questions while the interview questions were open-ended.

Study Findings and interpretation

In this paper only those study findings, which relate to teacher morale will be reported. The findings of the complete study have been reported elsewhere (Mackenzie 2004).

Participants were unanimous in their claim that students benefit from high teacher morale. This is supported by the literature, which suggests that worker efficiency is directly linked to high morale (Ramsey 2000). While more than half (66 percent) of the participants agreed that teacher morale in general is not positive in current times, almost as many (53 percent) claimed that teacher morale in their own school was positive. This would appear to be contradictory. Most (66 percent) did, however, agree that teacher morale is lower than when they began teaching. Those more likely to describe morale as lower now than when they began their career were participants who had been teaching for more than twenty years while those who had been teaching

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less than ten years suggested that morale had always been low. It may be interpreted from these data that teacher morale was considered by teachers to be higher in the 1970s and early 1980s than in the past two decades. Alternatively those who have been teaching more than twenty years may be looking back upon their early careers through *rose coloured glasses*. Given the large percentage of the profession who fall into the older age bracket these teachers may be unintentionally dampening the enthusiasm of the younger teachers. The participants in this study identified many different reasons for low morale and these are discussed in order of frequency, supported by sample quotes from participants.

Leadership

Almost all of the study participants (97 percent) suggested that leadership at a school level had a major impact on morale while 95 percent also identified leadership at a system level as important. For example,

Teacher morale is a by-product of visible, demonstrated support and respect from those who administer the system . . . (study participant).

If effective leadership has a positive effect upon morale, it is likely that poor leadership could lead to poor morale. Leadership at the government level came under attack from a number of participants as is illustrated by the following statement:

Until governments treat education as a high priority, the cynicism felt by teachers will continue to inhibit the morale and thereby levels of commitment to teaching well into the future . . . (study participant).

A Class Act (1998), reports that teachers in Australia perceive that the government has retreated from education and that this contributes to low morale amongst teachers in Australia. In early 2004 suggestions by the Prime Minister that public education

was 'values free' and too 'politically correct' created considerable debate amongst educators (Lovat & Schofield 2004) and anger amongst public school teachers.

Teachers perceive these kinds of public statements as undermining the quality of their work and the legitimacy of the policies and curriculum documents informing their practice. According to Lumsden (1998)

although individuals can take steps to maintain their professional satisfaction and morale, they must also be nurtured, supported and valued by the broader school community (p.5).

However, the following statement, from a study participant (a classroom teacher), places the responsibility for morale on the individual, contradicting many of the comments made by other participants and the literature:

Morale is at an all time low – but not with those teachers who want to be involved . . . I firmly believe you get out of teaching what you are prepared to put in (study participant).

Inevitably, situations will vary from school to school and teacher to teacher and what may be achievable in one setting may be impossible in another, such is the diversity in the school system.

Workload

According to the literature, teacher workload has been a problem for more than two decades (Sachs 2003; Hoyle 2001). Teaching conditions have changed and intensified in more recent times due to heightened expectations, broader demand, increased accountability, more “social work” responsibilities, multiple innovations and increased amounts of administrative work leading to overload (Sachs 2003; Hoyle 2001). Participants in this study were generally in agreement regarding a connection between workload, working conditions and poor morale (89 percent) with almost all

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participants (88 percent) claiming that teaching was harder now than it was when they started teaching. Perhaps, as is suggested by the following quote, the problem for teachers is not so much the teaching itself but coping with the paper-work and pressure associated with increased accountability and transparency that makes the job seem more difficult:

Teacher morale is fading because teachers are tiring through over-assessment, misguided and poorly designed definitions of accountability . . . excessive and ultimately purposeless paperwork (study participant).

Status of teaching

Most participants in this study (88 percent) identified a strong relationship between the status of teaching as a profession and the current low morale of teachers. For example,

When the status is high – morale often increases and *vice versa* (study participant).

The majority of participants (74 percent) also suggested that the status of teaching had declined since they began teaching. The decline in teacher status identified by study participants began in the late 1970s (Crowther 2003) with 1998 identified as the time when the standing of teachers in society reached its lowest point (Dinham & Scott 1998a). Eltis (1997) suggests teachers are seen in the community as ‘public servants with very little autonomy’ occupying ‘a very subservient role, always accountable to superiors’ (p.8). Dinham and Scott (1998b) attest that while the pressures and expectations on schools are at an all time high ‘paradoxically, the standing of teachers in society has probably never been lower’ (p. 2). The competencies of teachers are widely contested by the community with continuing ‘ambiguity about teachers’

expertise' (Hoyle 2001, p.143). While the status of teaching appears to be low, evidence suggests that the community sees teachers as ethical and honest (Morgan Opinion Poll 2003). Community attitude was seen by many study participants to be both important and difficult to change with the suggestion that teacher status will not change

unless there is a complete paradigm shift in the administration of education and a generational change in community attitudes . . . the community easily conveys its prejudices and misunderstandings from one generation to the next . . . since we all have experiences of the classroom . . . we all believe ourselves to be experts on the delivery of education and what makes good teaching practice . . . community perceptions serve to prevent advancement in the status of teachers . . . (study participant).

Reasons given for lack of community respect for the teaching profession (as opposed to individual teachers) were discussed earlier in this paper and confirmed by the participants in the study informing this paper.

Pay or salary

Pay or salary level was identified by 88 percent of study participants as the most obvious solution to the poor status of the teaching profession and a major reason for the poor morale of teachers (71 percent of study participants). Teacher salaries are, according to the literature, a major 'status' factor (Kalantzis & Harvey 2002) and have not kept pace with salaries of other professions (*A Class Act* 1998). Vinson, Esson & Johnston (2001) also suggest that in NSW public education the question of teacher remuneration 'has become entangled with teachers' perceptions of lack of employer respect' (Chapter 1, p.8). Salaries may however, be difficult to improve, given the nature of teacher employment (Hoyle 2001). The salary issue divided study participants into two groups. Participants in classroom teaching positions more often

identified salary as strongly linked to status while executive members were not so definite. This may be linked to the fact that classroom teachers employed by the NSW DET reach the highest rate of pay that they can achieve in nine years (*A Class Act* 1998) and may stay at that level for the remainder of their teaching career. The only way to improve salary after reaching the top of the scale is to move into an executive position, or move out of the school into a non-school based consultancy or administrative position. These career pathways are neither desirable to, nor attainable by all teachers.

Media

Data from this study have indicated that teachers feel that the media impacts upon teacher morale with 81 percent of participants in agreement that media attention, which highlights and dramatizes negative situations and ignores the successes of schools, leads to poor teacher morale. For example,

Intense media scrutiny always highlighting negatives - rarely positives (study participant).

Although participants may have been referring to media in general, an examination of the ‘comics’, published in the NSW Teachers Federation Newspaper, *Education*, which is sent to all federation members each month presents a dilemma. The comics, which run under the title of *Those who Can’t* (Rosser 2002), although probably intended to satirize teaching could be perceived of as having a negative impact upon the morale of practising teachers; something of which teachers reading the comics may not be aware.

Student welfare and behaviour

Student welfare and behaviour problems were identified by 79 percent of study participants as a major reason for low teacher morale. The literature suggests that teachers are being required more than ever to act as social workers and family figures (Lawrence 1999), and meet the needs of students with a wider range of abilities.

Many teachers are experiencing increasing problems with behaviour and discipline (Buckingham 2003), leading to high stress, decreased satisfaction and poor morale.

The following quote highlights a feeling of impotence on behalf of schools and teachers to deal effectively with some students.

A sense of impotence that comes with a paucity of functional procedures to deal with persistently incorrigible and unconscionable students . . . Teacher morale would skyrocket if schools were given sufficient powers to deal immediately and firmly with such recalcitrants [sic], rather than have them free to continue their indiscipline while the Principal consults his suspension record, while the teacher finds time to write another referral, while the discipline committee finds time to meet. *Ad infinitum* (study participant).

Limited access to quality Professional Development

It has been claimed that teacher satisfaction is directly linked to student achievement, while dissatisfaction is usually linked to issues which are largely out of the control of the teachers and schools within the wider domain of society, governments and their employing body (Dinham and Scott 1998b, p.14). This notion of satisfaction may be seen as directly related to teacher effectiveness, which may in turn be connected to access to relevant professional development. More than half of the study participants identified a connection between access to relevant professional development and teacher morale. The following quote illustrates a sentiment expressed by several study participants regarding disappointment in the NSW DET's commitment to professional

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development and suggesting that the DET does not offer enough Professional Development support to its teachers:

Not enough PD . . . DET does not match the efforts of its good teachers (study participant).

While education systems demonstrate in their annual reports that they are allocating extensive funding to teacher professional development, it would appear that a concerning percentage of teachers in this study do not feel that their needs are being met and have identified this as impacting upon their morale. The mismatch between professional learning opportunities offered to teachers and the perceived needs of teachers themselves is an area in need of further research.

Improving Morale

Participants were invited to provide suggestions for ways that teacher morale could be improved. This was perceived to be neither easy nor straightforward as is seen in the following statement:

There isn't one single issue that will improve teacher morale – it is a combination (study participant).

The data from the 101 participants provided 245 suggestions of ways to improve morale. Where possible the suggestions were grouped with a summary of the nine most common suggestions provided in Table 1. The most common suggestions of ways to improve teacher morale (from 56 participants) related to working conditions and workload. Thirty-nine suggestions related to salaries, while 36 participants suggested that supportive leadership was the key to improving teacher morale. The next two most popular suggestions related to media attention and recognition of groups and individuals. Nineteen participants suggested that morale might be

improved if teachers had access to what they deemed to be high quality professional development, with improved career structure the next most popular suggestion (11 participants), followed by suggestions relating to support for student welfare and discipline issues (10 participants). Eight participants suggested a need to slow down the pace of change. None of these suggestions is surprising or novel. The complexity of the issue and the diversity of teacher opinion are however reinforced by the number of suggestions.

| Suggestions | Participants |
|--|---------------------|
| Improved working conditions (workload and reduced stress) | 56 |
| Better pay / professional salaries / without a battle with employers | 39 |
| Supportive leadership at all levels | 36 |
| Positive media attention | 21 |
| Recognition /acknowledgement for groups and individuals | 21 |
| Provide access to high quality training and development | 19 |
| Improve career structures. Allow good teachers to remain in their vocation | 11 |
| Provide more student behaviour/discipline support | 10 |
| Slow down the amount and pace of change | 8 |

Table 1. How to improve teacher morale (Most common suggestions).

Summary and further considerations

The study reported in this paper confirms that teacher morale is currently low in many NSW DET schools (Mackenzie 2004) and in crisis in Australia generally (Hicks

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2003) with teachers feeling undervalued, frustrated, unappreciated and demoralized (Mackenzie 2004; Smyth 2001). This decline in morale has been gradual, accompanied by an increase in the demands placed upon teachers and a downgrading of the status of the profession in the eyes of the community. While data referred to in this paper came from teachers working in NSW DET schools it is anticipated that the situation would be similar in other public education systems across Australia.

Links are identified between morale and status, leadership, salaries, workload, media coverage and student welfare (Mackenzie 2004). A current lack of political and community confidence in the quality of teaching leading to increased accountability and standardized testing aimed at accountability, competition, ranking, choice and ‘value for money’ suggests a lack of regard for the professionalism of teachers while substantially increasing workload and further contributing to low teacher morale. Coupled with an increase in government funding to private schools (ACDE 2004) as a means of providing increased choice for parents (*A Class Act* 1998) this implies that public schools may not be able to offer the same quality of education as private schools and reflects an elitism which militates against equality and thus impacts upon teacher morale in public schools potentially relegating them to *second-class* teachers.

The literature is divided in its discussion of status and morale with some suggesting that the status of teaching is influenced most at the macro level of society, while morale is influenced more at the system and school level (Wenger 2000; Lumsden 1998; Verdugo et al 1997). Although Rogers (1992) identifies both internal and external factors as impacting upon morale, Young (1998) suggests that outside factors have more influence. On the other hand, morale may be more complex than

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previously understood, with two levels of morale ('school morale' and 'professional morale') unintentionally identified by the teachers informing this paper and a third suggested by the author: 'personal morale'.

Three levels of morale

'Personal morale' results from an individual teacher's personal circumstances, including health, family situation, financial stability etc. Although the status of the profession and in-school experiences will impact upon 'personal morale' many factors which influence 'personal morale' remain private and personal. Conversely, day-to-day experiences of teachers in their schools and local communities, lead to what is referred to here as 'school morale'. 'School morale' is influenced by 'personal morale' and vice versa. Morale which is inextricably intertwined with the status of teaching as a profession is referred to here as 'professional morale' or 'morale of the profession'. 'Professional morale' may impact on 'personal morale' and 'school morale' but may not impact on the day-to-day lives of teachers to the same extent as 'personal' and 'school morale'. These three overlapping forms or levels of morale create 'teacher morale': personal morale (largely within the control of the individual); school morale (which the individual teacher may have some influence over); and professional morale (which the individual may feel they have little or no influence on). That is:

Personal morale + School morale + Professional morale = Teacher morale.

This helps to explain why a good proportion (53 percent) of participants informing this study identified morale in their own school ('school morale') as positive while 66 percent suggested that the morale of teachers ('professional morale') across the NSW DET was poor. In many cases it was the same teachers who were identifying morale

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in their own school as high but claiming that teacher morale generally was low. While some schools are proving to be highly successful in maintaining 'school morale' (Mackenzie 2004), 'professional morale' continues to be linked to the low status of the profession. It may be 'professional morale' that teachers in the study were reporting when they suggested that the morale of teachers in general was low rather than 'school morale' or the more intimate 'personal morale' of the individual. The ideal situation would be for morale to be positive at all 3 levels.

Conclusion

Teacher morale in Australia is currently low and closely tied to the low status of the teaching profession. Given the reciprocal relationship between teacher morale and student learning (Ramsey 2000; OECD 2000) it is reasonable to conclude that schools will not be getting the best possible value from teachers who are affected by low morale. By extension, students in some schools may not be receiving the quality of teaching that they deserve and could receive if teacher morale was high. Teacher morale is complex and there are no easy formulas offering guaranteed improvement as demonstrated by the many suggestions offered by the participants in the study informing this paper. Improving the status of the profession could however have a positive impact on the collective morale of the profession which would in turn enhance opportunities for students, and increase community confidence in Australian education. Improved salaries and working conditions have the potential to improve the status of the profession, 'professional morale' and the desirability of teaching as a career. The recognition attached to improved salaries and working conditions could also provide teachers with the incentive to continue in what is recognised as an increasingly demanding role. Teachers also have a responsibility to work towards

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improving the status of the profession by being proud advocates for teaching as a career and mentoring early career teachers. At the same time, school communities should be supported in their ability to promote positive 'school morale' of all teachers using those schools currently proving to be successful in this endeavour as models. Teachers, students and the community will all benefit from improved teacher morale.

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