Teaching on the boundary: The experience of casual relief teachers

in New South Wales primary schools

Minami Uchida

Bachelor of Philosophy/Masters of Research (Education), Macquarie University, Australia

Department of Educational Studies

Faculty of Human Sciences

Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia

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Summary

Casual relief teachers (CRTs) replace the classroom teacher when they are absent and perform their duties as professionals in an often unfamiliar school environment. This research investigated the experiences of five CRTs in New South Wales schools. A sociocultural lens was used to examine how these CRTs operate within a school's community of practice through their legitimate peripheral participation. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews to explore the advantageous nature of casual teaching, including the strengths they developed as a CRT. Their responses were analysed through thematic content analysis to discern the emergence of major themes. The results of this study highlighted the participants' ability in adapting to the transient nature of their role and using their position on the periphery to learn about schools' rituals, rules and routines. This study builds a foundation for further research about the impact of CRTs in classrooms and the significance of their role in school communities.

Authorship statement

I hereby certify that this work titled *Learning on the boundary: the experience of casual teachers in New South Wales primary schools* has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree to any other university or institution than Macquarie University.

I also certify that the thesis is an original piece of research and it has been written by me. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

The research presented in this thesis was approved by the Macquarie University Faculty of Human Sciences Human Research Ethics Sub-Committee, No. 5201700395 (see Appendix A).

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Minami Uchida

Student number 42453844

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This study explores the experiences of Casual Relief Teachers (CRTs) teaching at the primary level (Kindergarten to Year 6) and their work at multiple schools. In particular, it focusses on the advantages of teaching as perceived by CRTs and the impact they can make on school communities.

This chapter outlines the study's background and research questions. It also discusses the significance of this study in relation to existing literature. In addition, it outlines the chapters included in this thesis.

1.2 Background of study

The position of CRTs is a unique one, with many replacing the regular teacher on a day-to-day basis without a classroom, or even a school community, to call their own. CRTs are vital to ensure the smooth operation of schools. Without CRTs, it would be difficult for staff to be absent due to maternity leave, sickness, professional development or other reasons. Due to the nature of their role, CRTs navigate teaching in a vastly different manner from staff that work in primary schools on a more consistent basis with their own class of established routines, expectations and rules. Existing literature have given detailed insights into the challenges faced by CRTs, including marginalisation from school communities (Charteris, Jenkins, Bannister-Tyrell, & Jones, 2017), being perceived as lacking legitimacy and authority by staff and students (Nicholas & Wells, 2016) and restricted access to professional learning, inductions and mentoring (Jenkins, Smith & Maxwell, 2009). However, there are limited studies which examine what CRTs consider to be advantageous, valuable or rewarding about their role.

Another issue highlighted by research is the importance of CRTs building relationships with staff and students to become integrated within school communities and learn how to operate as a teacher in the process. Using the framework devised by Lave and Wenger (1991), this research will explore the sociocultural phenomenon of learning as participation within a community of practice.

1.3 Statement of problem

Previous studies have examined the difficulties CRTs can experience due to the inconsistent and transient nature of their role. These studies are significant in highlighting the challenges that CRTs can face and investigating how school communities can take action to improve workplace experience for all staff, including its CRTs. Although the issue of CRT disadvantage had been investigated by previous studies, there are few studies which explicitly delve into what CRTs themselves see as an advantage of their role, what impact they make upon school communities, what professional strengths they develop by working as a CRT, and what they have learnt about schools and teaching through their position on the boundary of school communities.

1.4 Significance

This research holds significance in the education sector as a vast number of individuals are affected by the impact of casualisation across schools. Australian Bureau of Statistics (2009) reported that in 2008 there were approximately 822,200 teachers employed within the education sector nationally, which includes those in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. Of those teachers, 15% did not have access to entitlements including paid annual and sick leave – that is, they were employed on a casual basis. The number of CRTs who were employed in Victorian public schools has increased by 13% (Pearson, 2012) indicating the growing need for teachers who can work on a flexible basis.

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In light of the above empirical data, this research is significant in empowering CRTs to reflect upon, and give voice to, their own experiences and insights. The statistical data regarding employment supply and demand provides a factual overview about the scale of unstable employment; this research will provide in-depth personal perspectives on what the data do not reveal. The potential long-term significance includes contributing to government policies regarding professional practice and development for CRTs.

1.5 Personal context

The researcher worked as a CRT for eighteen months in New South Wales metropolitan primary schools prior to entering the Masters of Research (Education) program and commencing this study.

1.6 Research aim and questions

The aim of this study is to address the gap in existing literature about CRTs by highlighting the value of casual teaching as a profession.

There are three main research questions:

How and what have the participants learnt about their professional strengths through their work as CRTs?

Do participants perceive they make a contribution to school communities as a CRT? If so, what is the nature of that contribution?

What are the advantages of working as a CRT?

1.7 Chapter outline

Chapter Two provides a detailed review of existing literature on the topic of CRTs. It is divided into five broad themes which have emerged from previous studies. It also examines the relatively limited available literature on CRT advantages and strengths and highlights the

gap in research in this area. The theoretical lens of sociocultural learning, communities of practice and legitimate peripheral participation as devised by Lave and Wenger (1991) are also discussed.

Chapter Three outlines the methodology of the study. It details the processes for qualitative, semi-structured interviews with five participants. The analytical process of thematic content analysis is described in depth. The ethical concerns of this study are explored, including aspects of confidentiality and ensuring participants' emotional wellbeing whilst they reflect on and discuss their casual teaching experiences.

Chapter Four states the results of this study. It presents each participants' responses individually as profiles and captures their perceptions of casual teaching experience.

Chapter Five discusses the results of this study and draws out implications for CRTs and school communities. The results are discussed under four main themes: casual teaching as a necessity or a choice; skills gained as a result of casual teaching; advantages of being a CRT; and learning about and within school communities. The findings of this study are compared with existing literature to highlight gaps in research.

Chapter Six summarises the findings and acknowledges the limitations of this study. It also suggests potential directions for future studies to continue the exploration of CRT strengths and advantages.

1.8 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the background of this study to contextualise its significance within the wider existing literature. It stated the research questions to be investigated through semi-structured interviews as a method. The next chapter explores relevant literature to highlight the main themes which emerge from studies relating to CRTs and casual teaching experiences.

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Chapter 2: Literature review

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2.1 Introduction

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This review is organised according to the major themes that emerged from existing literature in relation to CRTs and the nature of their work. The themes are: perceived alienation experienced by CRTs; lack of authority they exert over students and school community; professional development and training opportunities offered by schools; and the role of building relationships between CRTs and the school community. The review also examines findings from previous studies which outline some positive aspects of teachers working on a casual basis.

2.2 The role of CRTs

CRTs, or alternatively referred to as substitute, supply, or relief teachers, are professional educators who replace classroom teachers when they are absent (Jenkins et al., 2009). CRTs work on a day-to-day basis, often at multiple schools across all stage levels they are qualified to teach (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2017). Their work is integral to the operation of schools as they provide a vital service in maintaining continuity of students' learning experiences whilst their classroom teacher is absent. CRTs are varied in their backgrounds, encompassing teachers with different professional identities, expertise and years of experience (Colcott, 2009). Like their permanent counterparts, CRTs must hold a relevant tertiary qualification, undergo a personal suitability interview if they wish to work in government and private schools, and complete criminal record and Working With Children background checks (Bamberry, 2011). On average, students are taught by CRTs for three hours every week (Pearson, 2012) which accumulates an equivalent of one year during their schooling from Kindergarten to Year 12 (Lunay & Lock, 2006). CRTs have significant presence in schools and are an indispensable part of the education system.

2.3 Alienation: working at the margins

Alienation is defined by Clifton and Rambaran (1987) as "those who are not integrated into the formal structure of an institution, and consequently cannot contribute meaningfully to the

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successful achievements of the desired goals of the institution" (p. 24). Several studies (e.g., Charteris et al., 2017; Clifton & Rambaran, 1987) have investigated the experiences of CRTs. These studies have identified alienation of CRTs from school communities as a common experience. The very nature of casual roles can cast their position on the periphery, as they may be employed in multiple schools at any one time, often without the time to build strong rapport with students, staff and the wider school community (Nicholas & Wells, 2016). In addition, it was found that CRTs can collectively feel excluded from the institutional structure of schools as they have less access to school information, staff development opportunities, learning materials and resources (Charteris et al., 2017). Their presence as teachers is also reportedly diminished due to less time to build relationship with students, limited social interaction with other staff members and an overall sentiment that they are operating at the margins of the school community (Nicholas & Wells, 2016).

The emotional isolation attached to CRTs consequently contributes to high attrition rates of early career teachers including CRTs, as it exacerbates "the feeling of separateness that comes with struggling on one's own, of not succeeding and not admitting to needing help or wanting to ask for it" (Buchanan, Prescott, Schuck, Aubusson, & Burke, 2013, p. 123). CRTs may be reluctant to ask for help as they fear that other staff may perceive this need for assistance as a sign of professional weakness or deficit. Papatrianou and Cornu (2014) reported that due to perceived hierarchical segregation within schools, CRTs did not ask for support "because they believed it would reveal their inadequacies, and possibly impede career progression or reduce the likelihood of securing ongoing employment" (p. 105). This fear of asking for assistance can become a chronic issue for CRTs as the lack of support can trigger further feelings of alienation and powerlessness. Additional feelings of alienation can stem from their powerlessness to make meaningful changes to the school community because

"Casual teachers are given very little opportunity to provide input into school decision-making processes" (Bamberry, 2011, p. 61).

Lunay and Lock (2006) focussed on the concept of alienation in their semi-structured interviews with 20 CRTs and found that participants experienced feelings of isolation (85%), powerlessness (60%) and meaninglessness (36%) manifested within their roles at Western Australian primary schools. These feelings of alienation arose mainly out of classroom management challenges and poor relationships with school staff who often perceived CRTs as outsiders. Feelings of entrenched inequality compared to permanent staff in areas such as being given extra playground duty resulted in CRTs "feeling used" (p. 11). Their work is often coloured by "a lack of control, a certain powerlessness felt by the individual and derived from the structure of social relations" (Rogers, 1995, p. 142). Therefore, alienation by the school community has a significant impact upon CRTs and how they feel about their work. Jenkins et al., (2009) concur that both secondary and primary education alumni who started their careers as CRTs have experienced "feelings of alienation, culture shock, a lack of school and systemic support, and are often not considered a part of school community by staff or students" (p. 63). Teaching is considered as a "nurturing profession" (p. 63) and as such, it is ethically and morally obliged to exemplify inclusion by supporting all teachers, regardless of their permanency status.

2.4 Lack of legitimacy and authority

CRTs are "perceived as 'lesser' group of teachers" (Colcott, 2009, p. 1) by other members of staff within the school community. Studies have explored disparaging attitudes internalised by permanent teachers and administrative staff towards CRTs, with a school principal in Cardon's (2002) research commenting that, "Most substitute teachers are incapable of creating an atmosphere of learning" (p. 30). Cardon also found that permanent teachers and senior members of staff often express a low regard for CRTs, describing them as "baby-

sitters, fillers, [and] a necessary evil" (p. 33). The professional authority of CRTs can be challenged by the school community when senior members of staff, including principals, view "the substitute as a one-day employee who isn't worth all the fuss" (Clifton & Rambaran, 1978, p. 136).

In addition to the challenges of asserting their legitimacy among staff members, CRTs must maintain authority in front of students. They are often viewed by students as possessing less legitimate authority than classroom teachers, which is reflected in CRTs' struggles with managing student behaviour (Botempo & Deay, 1986). Botempo and Deay (1986) surveyed 175 CRTs to gauge areas of teaching for which they felt the most and least prepared. Out of five categories representing difficulties faced by CRTs within their professional roles, it was found that classroom discipline and classroom procedures comprised 49% of the responses.

Asserting authority in front of students can be a difficult task, as chronicled in the study by Driedger-Enns (2014). She conducted a case study on the professional life of Penny, a primary school teacher in the United States working on a casual basis for three years since graduation. Penny commented, "I feel like I'm being mean all day. I don't like that. But you are kind of forced to be that. … Right now I put on a kind of façade and it's emotionally draining when kids are mean to you" (p. 91). CRTs are constantly challenged by the behavioural and academic needs of students and find difficulty in asserting their authority. As one CRT in the same study noted, "'I had to hold the rein so tightly… My personality was not given to them wholly, only part of it, because I had to make sure that I kept control'" (p. 259). It is evident that CRTs must constantly assert their legitimate authority in the classroom to uphold a positive learning environment. They also must be equipped with ongoing professional learning opportunities to ensure that they remain updated with relevant pedagogical practices which can assist in maintaining their legitimacy within the school community.

2.5 Professional learning opportunities

Professional learning is a significant part of work done by all teachers, including CRTs.
Cardon (2001) asserts that "the most effective means of attracting and keeping substitutes is
to provide training … as [it] legitimizes substitute teachers as insiders in the school
community and provides valued recognition of the role they play in teaching students" (p. 37-
38). However, CRTs are disadvantaged in regards to accessing professional learning by the
very nature of their work, which can prove inconsistent and impermanent. They are "often
'out of the loop' and lack information about the professional learning opportunities
available… [with] lack of professional development activities specifically targeted for CRTs"
(Charteris et al., 2015, p. 4). Despite the inequitable access to professional development, they
are faced with the complex task of demonstrating pedagogical flexibility by transferring
"skills from school to school on a daily basis, often with limited knowledge about the
students, colleagues, parents and the school community" (p. 5). It is the CRTs, especially
those just beginning in their careers, who may benefit most from targeted support to
overcome the various challenges inherent to their role.

CRTs are also often excluded from professional learning opportunities that are tailored to
their specific needs (Clifton & Rambaran, 1987). Bamberry (2011) noted that almost all 20 of
the participants in her study indicated they did not receive professional development or in-
service training, despite the expectation that they remain informed about curriculum changes
and departmental policies. Not only does this undermine CRTs' abilities to maintain their
pre-existing skills, but it reinforces the perception that CRTs are "less qualified and less up-
to-date" (p. 60) than their permanent peers. This disparaging view from other teachers impact
upon CRTs' future opportunities to secure a more stable position within the school,
perpetuating their employment instability. It is necessary for CRTs to access professional

learning that enable them to maintain and improve their existing skills that will be applied across multiple schools and stage levels (McCormack, Gore & Thomas, 2006)

One example of an initiative to engage CRTs in professional learning is from the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) (Colcott, 2009). VIT have funded over 80 schools to provide learning specifically targeted to CRTs, which includes general pedagogical strategies to employ across different school settings. These seminars are offered at no cost to schools across regional and metropolitan Victoria. ClassCover (2017) is another organisation which offers professional learning specifically for CRTs. Originally, ClassCover only functioned as a website and mobile phone App which allowed schools to view, contact and book available CRTs. It later developed into a platform known as the Relief Teacher Association, where CRTs across Australia can join with an annual fee to access dozens of professional learning courses that can be completed online. Courses offered include behaviour management strategies for CRTs, effective interactive whiteboard use in lessons, and maximising student engagement. These programs indicate the increasing accessibility of relevant professional learning opportunities for CRTs and the recognition that they need ongoing development to maintain their professional practice. However, it is not adequate to simply provide professional learning sessions; consistent follow-up by the school community is paramount to continue the momentum. For professional learning programs to be effective, teachers must be given time to immerse themselves into the school community with ample opportunities for reflection and collaboration (Elliot, Isaacs & Chugani, 2010). Essentially, schools must include CRTs within their professional learning opportunities to improve student outcomes.

Professional learning is also a crucial element of teacher accreditation. The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2014a) states that for graduate teachers to be deemed Proficient (a compulsory process that must be completed within five years as a CRT or part-time teacher), they must

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"Use the Australia Professional Standards for Teachers and advice from colleagues to identify and plan professional learning needs" (p. 20). This reflective and collaborative process is difficult to enact without continuing guidance from a school community. The access to professional learning can be compromised for CRTs as they may not have adequate time to familiarise themselves at one particular school to be involved in their professional learning sessions (McCormack & Thomas, 2005).

2.6 Building relationships with the school community

The school community can alleviate or exacerbate the difficulties CRTs may face in their work. Duggleby and Badali (2007) acknowledge that all teachers are shaped by the educational environment as no teacher and their pedagogy exist in a vacuum. They found that despite the rewarding aspects of CRTs' work, lack of mentoring and induction can breed tension in their professional lives as they struggle to build and maintain ongoing relationships with the school community. It is especially challenging for CRTs who work on an ad hoc basis rather than gaining consecutive days of work (or 'blocks') at one particular school as they are not afforded time to acquaint themselves fully with the staff, students and parents (Jenkins et al., 2009). CRTs are ultimately dependent on schools to extend them quality support (Kelly, Reushle, Chakrabarty, & Kinnane, 2014).

Qualitative data by Nicholas and Wells (2016) suggest that CRTs must be given full access to school resources and knowledge to build strong relationships within the school community. Their results reveal that CRTs find difficulty in practising aspects of teaching that involve close interactions with schools and their policies, or those that require specialist interventions from other staff (e.g., meeting the needs of students with disabilities). AITSL (2014b) support this viewpoint, stating that "the strongest networks, where the most discussion and collaboration to implement the standards occurred, were collegial networks" (p. 27). CRTs are also compromised in their ability to demonstrate professional engagement with

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colleagues, parents/carers, and the wider community as detailed in Standard 7 (AITSL, 2014a), because they spend significantly less time situated at one school to familiarise themselves with the community (Lunay & Lock, 2006). CRTs are therefore greatly dependent on building relationships with the school communities in which they are employed; it can mean the difference between isolation and feelings of being an outsider or opportunities to collaborate and make a genuine difference in the community.

The extent to which the school culture has a commitment to inclusivity can have a significant impact upon CRTs' ability to develop relationships with other staff. Buchanan et al. (2013) found that support from other staff within the school is paramount in CRTs "building their own professional networks… thereby co-constructing a collegial and facilitative learning environment" (p. 114). The researchers also concluded that when experienced teachers openly share their resources or expertise to newcomers it can "serve as a morale-booster… both in terms of knowledge, insights, and perspectives gained, and in terms of a welcoming gesture to a profession and to a school" (p. 118). The importance of CRTs building positive relationships with the school community was also highlighted by Jenkins et al. (2009), who reported that CRTs tended to avoid schools that did not offer collegial support, as this "proved demoralising and affected their persistence to look for work" (p. 71). Thus, CRTs who work in an inclusive and supportive school community feel that their work impacts positively upon their professional lives.

2.7 Positive aspects of being a CRT

Although the existing literature largely has a focus on the challenges faced by CRTs, some studies have reported merits of teaching on a casual basis. Kivunja, Reitano, Harrington, and Jones (2008) investigated the experiences of 20 new graduates from the University of New England who started their careers as CRTs. Advantages of working as a CRT included flexibility in lifestyle, manageable workload (especially for those teachers who have a family

of their own), and being distant from staff politics. Some teachers enjoyed the work itself, including being able to have autonomy over what they taught without the responsibility of programming or assessment. As one participant commented, "'The thing I like most about casual teaching is walking in with lots of fresh new ideas and doing lots of practical things with the kids that they might not usually be able to do'" (p. 5). CRTs that derived enjoyment from their work also utilised various coping skills which they have personally developed over the course of their careers. These strategies included not engaging in self-blame, establishing clear behavioural expectations of students, learning school rules and procedures in a timely manner and collecting resources so they could be prepared for lessons across all Key Learning Areas. Depending on the supervisor of the workplace, May, Campbell, and Burgess (2005) also contend that casual employees may enjoy a high degree of flexibility in their work which can suit their particular lifestyle needs. However, the authors emphasise that casual workers generally remain "far more vulnerable to practices such as summary dismissal, variation in hours and schedules [and] arbitrary treatment" (p. 2).

2.8 Gaps in literature

The current body of literature relating to CRTs is largely focussed on a model of deficit. CRT roles are construed as "frustrating and ineffective" in nature (Deutchman, 1983, p. 397) or as an interruption during the journey towards a full-time, permanent position (Driedger-Enns, 2014). Some literature emphasises CRTs as employees whose work is characterised by feelings of marginalisation, powerlessness, anxiety and stress (Bamberry, 2011; Charteris et al., 2013; Clifton & Rambaran, 1987; McCormack & Thomas, 2005). In order to empower CRTs and reveal the positive influence they have upon the school community, this study explores the impact CRTs perceive they have on schools and what they learn about the students and staff from their relative position on the periphery of the school communities.

2.9 Theoretical lens

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2.9.1 Sociocultural theory of learning

Sociocultural theorists posit that learning is a social process that arises from one's interaction with the environment and with others. This perspective contrasts cognitive behavioural theories of learning which emphasise the brain's functions in executing mental functions (Palinscar, 1998). Sociocultural perspectives argue that knowledge is both an individual and social process, with development being conceptualised as "the transformation of socially shared activities into internalised processes" (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p. 191). Learning becomes inseparable from the social and cultural context the individual operates within; it is in stark contrast to the notion that learning is a passive transmission from an expert to a novice. Bruner (1966) argued that learning transcends mastery of content; it is the cultural context surrounding the learner which allows individuals to internalise knowledge and communicate with others. This perspective is further reinforced by Rogoff (1994), who asserted that learning involves the active participation of the learner. She envisioned the community-of-learners approach, where individuals operate in informal learning environments to absorb important information through observation, participation and contribution to the task at hand. In this way, cognitive and social development of human beings becomes a process that can only be understood "in light of practices and circumstances of their communities – which also change" (Rogoff, 2003, p. 4).

2.9.2 Community of practice

Encompassed within the sociocultural lens is Lave and Wenger's (1991) theoretical model of learning, known as the community of practice. Learning is viewed by Wenger (1998) as "an encompassing process of being active participants in the practices of social communities and constructing identities in relation to those communities" (p. 4). Within a community of practice, an individual can collaboratively learn knowledge and skills through mutual

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engagement, which involves community members deepening their partnership by establishing rules and norms, and recognising each other's capabilities in transforming the other's practice (Wenger, 2000). These norms then lead members to partake in a joint enterprise, where each member has "…a specific aim [which] feeds into the overall purpose the group" (Roberts, 2006, p. 633). Through these interactions between members, they are able to build a shared repertoire which includes "traditions, methods, standards, routines and frameworks [that] define the practice" (Wenger, 2000, p. 231) and shape the community to be distinct from others.

Thus, an individual learns through interacting with a specific community bound together by a common interest or goal. Learning is not solely cognitive in nature, but essentially requires individuals to form, and be formed by, the sociocultural context they inhabit. Learning is not divorced from the social world and is essentially "the experience of being human" (Williams, Ritter, & Bullock, 2012, p. 246).

Li, Grimshaw, Nielsen, Judd, Coyte and Graham, (2009) refine the concept of a strong community of practice as a place where newcomers have access to material and mentoring and a space where relationships are founded upon mutually respectful interactions. In essence, the community is a strong social structure that allows for collaborative interaction and relationships to thrive; the practice includes specific knowledge that is shared, developed, understood and maintained by community members (Li et al., 2009). Furthermore, learning is conceptualised by Wenger (2000) as a symbiotic relationship between the individual and the learning environment which they inhabit. It is a process that has a dualistic impact, as "learning involves changes in the learner as well as changes in the contexts in which the learner is situated" (Williams et al., 2012, p. 246).

2.9.3   *Legitimate Peripheral Participation*

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For Wenger (1998), participation in a community of practice is an active process which involves making a connection with other members. These actions help to shape the experience of the individual and they also shape the community. As individuals invest themselves in a community enterprise, various forms of accountability arise through which the individual can make his or her contribution to the joint enterprise of the community. In doing so, the individual develops new knowledge of the community and a greater sense of belonging to it. This process is particularly relevant to new members who are absorbed into the community's practices and operations. Later, they move from what Lave and Wenger (1991) refer to as 'legitimate peripheral participation' towards becoming full participants. For Lave and Wenger, legitimate peripheral participation "… draw[s] attention to the point that learners inevitably participate in communities of practitioners and that the mastery of knowledge and skills requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the sociocultural practices of a community" (1991, p. 109).

Learning is viewed as a social process which allow novices to situate themselves within a community of practice and learn about the community through participation in its activities. Thus, legitimate peripheral participation is a social process of learning that involves situated activity where newcomers are first located at the boundary of a community of practice as legitimate participants. Later, they gradually penetrate deeper into the practice with increasing engagement and interaction (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Learning is thus built on relationships and is "a mutual engagement in an activity" (Fuller, Hodkinson, Hodkinson & Unwin, 2005, p. 52) within a defined community.

Importantly, there are potential advantages for newcomers through their legitimate peripheral participation in a community. They are able not only to observe the practices of the community from this vantage point but also participate "… as a way of learning - of both absorbing and being absorbed in - the culture of practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 95).

However, the key to learning from a position of legitimate peripheral participation is access to the community of practice, its members and its practices.

2.10 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the current literature on CRTs by dividing it into broad themes which emerged. It found that existing research tends to focus on the deficit model of casual teaching where the focus is on CRTs' alienation, lack of legitimate authority and difficulty of access to professional development and other school-based resources. It also outlined the theoretical lens which is employed in this study to examine how and what CRTs can learn on the boundary of school communities as legitimate peripheral participants. The next chapter explains the research design and method of this study and its ethical considerations.

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Chapter 3: Research design and method

3.1 Introduction

This study aims to fill the gap in current literature about the advantages of working on a casual basis and the ways in which the experience of CRTs in schools can be improved. The findings are analysed through the lens of Lave and Wenger's (1991) sociocultural theory of learning. In particular, the study focuses on whether participants can operate as active members of a school community from their peripheral positions as CRTs.

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3.2 Research approach

Qualitative method was chosen to investigate the questions involving "what is, how and why" (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013, p. 4) and in the process examine the "the social constructs, beliefs and behaviours" (Ritchie et al. 2013, p. 1) that are manifested within CRTs, school communities, and its staff and students. Semi-structured interview was used for this study to gain in-depth insights into casual relief teaching experiences

The audio files from semi-structured interviews were sent to an external transcription service for text conversion. The texts were entered into NVivo software for interpretation and coding using an inductive method of analysing text material. The coding was then used to assist in generating a cross-case analysis based on emerging themes.

3.3 Participants

The participants for this study were five CRTs. Two participants were male and three were female with age range between 24 and 43. There was a wide discrepancy in length of time they had been working as casual teachers; the shortest time was seven months, and longest approximately ten years. Participant demographics are displayed in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Participant demographics

Participant pseudonym	Gender	Age	Length of experience as CRT
Alison	F	23	1 year 6 months
Becky	F	23	1 year 6 months
Chloe	F	24	2 years 4 months
David	M	35	7 months
Ethan	M	43	10 years

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The researcher had established personal and professional relationships with all participants prior to the study taking place. Three participants (Alison, Becky and Chloe) were close friends. David was a colleague from a vacation care program located in Macquarie University and Ethan works as CRT in a public school that the researcher is also employed at on a part-time basis. Careful consideration was made to uphold confidentiality, especially since the researcher held some knowledge about participants' working lives prior to the study. There was a potential conflict of interest working with participants who were friends and colleagues in case of "participants unintentionally providing information due to the pre-existing, trusting relationship" (McDermid, Peters, Jackson, & Daly, 2014, p. 29).

Recruitment of participants was also negotiated with sensitivity and without undue pressure to prevent any perceived feelings of coercion. They were reminded that they could withdraw from the study at any time, and that there were no negative consequences if they declined to participate. With these ethical considerations in mind, there were advantages to recruiting personal friends and colleagues as participants. The pre-existing relationship was a foundation for trust and rapport during the interview process. The familiarity between researcher and participant enforced "respect for the information that is shared," which led participants to speak as their authentic selves in a safe environment (McDermid et al., 2014,

p. 31). Another aspect to consider was that the researcher also worked as a CRT, thus sharing an "insider" view of their professional world (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 55). One advantage of being an insider is that "Participants might be more willing to share their experience because there is an assumption of understanding" (p. 58). Thus, the key component in the selection of participants was the researcher's commitment to be "open, honest, authentic, interested and insightful" about casual teaching experiences of all participants (McDermid et al., 2009, p. 33)

3.4 Settings

The interviews were conducted either in-person (Alison, Chloe and David) or online through Skype (Becky and Ethan). The researcher's private office at Macquarie University was used as a setting for in-person interviews whilst Skype interviews were conducted at the researcher's and participants' homes. Both environments ensured privacy, creating a "comfortable environment where the participants [did] not feel restricted or uncomfortable to share information" (Turner, 2010, p. 757). The online setting of some interviews did not seem to impact participants' ability to give detailed answers, although some studies suggest that "the lack of face-to-face contact is said to restrict the development of rapport… [an] element considered to be important for generating rich qualitative data" (Irvine, Drew, & Sainsbury, 2012, p. 88). Any potential disadvantages of online interviews were mitigated by the established relationship between participants and researcher. Although face-to-face interviews were not practical for all participants, both settings ensured mutual privacy and comfort.

3.5 Interview process

The interviews were conducted individually with each of the five participants using an interview schedule (see Appendix B). Interviews varied between 25 and 37 minutes in length.

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Prior to the interview, it was made clear in the Participant Consent Form (see Appendix C) that the interview would be recorded and transcribed by an external transcription service. A semi-structured interview was chosen for this study primarily because "Qualitative interviewing involves entering the life-world of participants" (Elmir, Schmied, Jackson, & Wilkes, 2011, p. 13). This enabled the researcher to delve deeply into experiences, perspectives and motivations of participants and their working lives. A semi-structured interview format also helped to ensure participant responses were sufficiently aligned with the research questions for the study. At the same time, the interview structure remained flexible enough to probe participants' responses with further questions, or for them to recount personal anecdotes they deemed as important (Rabionet, 2011).

The interview schedule consisted of five sections. Lave and Wenger's (1991) theoretical lens assisted in the formulation of questions, ensuring that it incorporated perspectives about their positions in relation to school communities and their contributions to schools as legitimate peripheral participants. In Section One, participants' professional backgrounds were explored with questions relating to length of casual teaching experience and whether they were given any short-term "blocks" working with the same school and/or class. Section Two involved what participants saw as the main advantages of working on a casual basis and what they gained from the CRT role. Section Three related to their learning on the periphery of school communities, as well as whether schools accommodated their needs through inductions, mentoring and professional learning opportunities. Section Four involved participants reflecting upon their contributions to the schools they had worked at and whether they felt valued by the school communities. The last section delved into perception of their work by asking them for a metaphor to encapsulate their casual relief teaching experience. The interview concluded by giving participants the opportunity to make any general comments about being a CRT. These questions gave participants the opportunity to reflect upon their

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status as newcomers and what they had learnt as legitimate peripheral members in a school community.

3.6 Analytical process

Thematic content analysis was used to systematically explore generated text data and allow commonalities across participant responses to emerge (MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2014). Thematic content analysis is used when "Researchers avoid using preconceived categories, instead allowing the categories and names of categories to flow from data" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1279). The inductive approach was advantageous for this study as it allowed the researcher to gain "direct information from study participants without imposing preconceived categories" (p. 1280). It is structured to capture the complexity of diverse human experiences by "analytically… breaking the text into relatively small units of content and submitting them to descriptive treatment" (Vaismoradi, Bondas & Turunen, 2013, p. 400). The following section will describe the process of analysis in detail.

3.6.1 Preparation

In alignment with the method of thematic content analysis, the data were coded based on three phases outlined by Elo and Kyngas (2008), which are preparation, organising and reporting. In the preparation phase, the researcher made herself familiar with the data by reading through the generated texts multiple times. This phase led to general comprehension of participant responses and the creation of tentative codes for later categorisation. Thus, it involved "making sense of data and whole" (Elo & Kingas, 2008, p. 110) by asking key questions such as "Who is telling? Where is this happening? When did it happen? What is happening? Why?" (p. 109). Once the interview texts were read multiple times and sufficiently understood as a whole, they were loaded into NVivo software for detailed exploration.

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3.6.2 Organising

Organising was the next phase in analysis. Open coding was used to explore data without pre-determined categories. The text was once again read by the researcher, this time inserting memos in relevant text passages to signify their potential category. Memos are short summaries which assist in making sense of, and making links between, different categories within the text. Memos give insights and help the researcher to reflect on materials under analysis (Welsh, 2002). Additionally, for each participant response which contained significant information or meaning, a new node was made. Nodes are "a set of concepts which adequately represent the information in the interview transcripts" (Cote, Salmena, Baria, & Russell, 1993, p. 130). Some nodes were direct quotes from the text and others were interpretations of participant responses: for example, the word "flexible" was a node which was a direct quote from a participant who stated "I think the biggest strength is just… being very, very flexible" (Chloe). On the other hand, a node "expectation of competence" was derived from the response "they pretty much left you to their own devices" (Chloe). All the nodes were then compared with each other to merge them into categories: for example, nodes such as "adaptability," "behaviour management" and "confidence" were collapsed into a category of "strengths developed from being a CRT." This step served the purpose to systematically compartmentalise a large volume of generated text into discrete categories. To further synthesise the categories, similar categories were collapsed into one: for example, categories of "strengths developed from being a CRT" and "personal philosophy of teaching" were collapsed into one as "Advantages of being a CRT." This was a flexible and considered process whereby the researcher had to "come to a decision, through interpretation, as to which things to put in the same category" (Elo & Kyngas, 2007, p. 111). These categories were considered as the main themes which provided materials for reporting of results.

3.6.3 Reporting

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The last step in the coding process was reporting of analysed data and its results, which can be found in a latter section of this thesis (see Chapter 4). Due to the intrinsically subjective nature of qualitative content analysis, the reliability of results may be compromised depending on the researcher's experience and perspectives (Elo & Kyngas, 2007). However, the main priority in qualitative interview as a method is validity within the specific context of participants, rather than reliability (Liedtka, 1992). Therefore, this study achieved its qualitative aim of discerning participant perspectives through participant reflection and dialogue.

3.7 Ethical concerns

This study ensured that participant confidentiality and wellbeing were maintained throughout the interview. The following sections describe how this was achieved.

3.7.1 Confidentiality

As explored in a previous section, confidentiality of participants was paramount in maintaining the integrity of this study. It was especially important since participants were essentially self-disclosing highly personal experiences of casual relief teaching to a researcher who is also a CRT. In particular, one participant worked as a CRT at the same school as the researcher, putting him at a potentially vulnerable position if his responses were detrimental to his position within the school community (McDermid et al., 2009). There was also a fine line between being a researcher and being a friend/colleague with the participants. The risk was that the role of interviewer as an intimate friend/colleague "crosses conversational trust boundaries and may entice the participant into providing information that they might later regret" (Corbin & Morse, 2003, p. 338). Thus, the interview dynamic revealed a potential risk associated with building a strong rapport with participants, rather than acting as a wholly professional and emotionally detached interviewer. However,

research by Tillman-Healy (2003) suggests that for this type of in-depth interview to be successful, some form of trust and friendship must be present. To ensure confidentiality within the interviews, participants were instructed to withhold their names and school names from their responses. At any point when they inadvertently used identifying names, these were edited out of the recording using Audacity, an audio manipulation software, prior to the recording being sent for transcription.

3.7.2 Emotional wellbeing of participants

Another ethical consideration was interviewing participants on topics that were potentially difficult for them to discuss. There was a risk that sensitive issues such as some of the challenges they were exposed to whilst casual teaching may "elicit powerful emotional responses such as anger, sadness, embarrassment, fear and anxiety" (Elmir et al., 2011, p. 12). Potential distress was mitigated by the rapport established between participants and researcher prior to the interview taking place as the participants were already familiar with the researcher through collegial and personal relations (McDermid et al., 2014). Throughout the interview, open questions were used to probe participant experiences, perspectives and emotions with professionalism and sensitivity. Examples of open questions included, "Do you think you have an impact on student learning? If so, in what ways?" and "Has your work as a CRT been valued by the school community? How do you know?" Participants were given time to formulate their answers and their silence was respected (Elmir et al., 2011). Although there were inherent emotional risks in asking participants to discuss topics that may expose their personal and/or professional vulnerabilities, "there is no indication that this distress is any greater than in everyday life" (Corbin & Morse 2003, p. 335). Even so, care was taken by the interviewer to monitor any outward signs of emotional distress during the interview. With due consideration given to adequate harm reduction, Lowes and Gills (2006) found that participants in their study benefitted from talking about emotive topics despite

their initial reservations, as participants found it somewhat therapeutic to have a willing listener to re-tell their experiences.

3.7.3 Researcher positionality

As mentioned in previous sections, it was challenging to navigate the boundary between a researcher and a friend/colleague. An issue related to this distinction suggested by Allmark et al. (2005) was the potential over-involvement of the researcher during the interview; the interviewer may start taking on the role of a therapist in order to comfort the participants whilst they recount difficult experiences. Initially, it was hard for the researcher to ensure that she was not giving advice or unnecessary feedback to the first interviewee to make her feel better about perceived challenges. The researcher's tendency to try and relate to the participant by telling her own stories of casual teaching was also noticeable in the first interview. To prevent this from occurring in subsequent interviews, participants were given enough time to adequately formulate their thoughts before speaking and the interviewer withheld from disclosing personal information about her own experiences until after the interview had concluded.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter described the process of participants' selection and recruitment for semi-structured interviews. The procedures for conducting the interviews and the analysis of the interview transcripts using thematic code analysis were also outlined in detail. Ethical concerns were addressed to ensure the emotional wellbeing of participants and to maintain their confidentiality. The next chapter will describe the results of interviews conducted with participants and summarise their responses as profiles.

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Chapter 4: Results – profiles of participants

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the findings from interviews conducted with five CRTs who have

worked in NSW primary schools. A short profile is presented for each participant to describe

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their individual experiences including how they started as a CRT, how they perceived their roles as a teacher, what they saw as advantages to being a CRT, and their impression of the different school communities in which they worked.

4.2 Alison

Shortly after graduating with a Bachelor of Arts (Psychology) and Diploma of Primary Education in 2015, Alison elected to work as a CRT at the primary school she attended as a child. In addition, she sent her CV to schools around her area. She started receiving regular shifts as a CRT and was able to work on days when she was not at university completing her Masters in Special Education full-time. Alison had been working as a CRT for about four months when she received an offer of a permanent full-time position from the NSW Department of Education, as she had been identified as a targeted graduate. Due to her future plans to work overseas the following year, she declined the offer. In the two years she had worked as a CRT, permanent positions were offered on four separate occasions, all of which she declined.

Alison expressed initial anxiety about entering the classroom as a CRT. On her first day at work, no lesson plans or resources were left and her "voice was shaking at one point." She was unsure of her abilities to help each child and differentiate appropriately for students whom she had only just met, with her main concern being "helping everyone and making sure that everyone was on task." The uncertain nature of casual teaching was also a challenge, especially in the mornings as she anticipated the telephone call which would ask her to arrive at school to replace another teacher within hours. When she arrived, she would sometimes be asked to take a different class each hour, testing her ability to think on her feet and adjust for each new class.

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Despite these difficulties, Alison quickly adapted to the nature of casual teaching to the point that it does not "faze" her anymore. The flexibility offered by casual teaching also made it possible for her to combine work and study. Working as a CRT has also developed her strengths as a teacher, primarily the confidence to teach across all grade levels with students of all abilities. As a CRT, she was able to develop her behaviour management skills which were underpinned by her personal philosophy that she must enter all classrooms with a positive attitude toward students to earn their respect. On one occasion when a student with challenging behaviour did not comply with her instructions, she was supported by the school administrators who responded to her calls for help by temporarily removing the student from her classroom.

Alison also held the belief that she was able to impart something new to students, especially since "…every teacher has a different way of doing things [and] having a different teacher might give them an opportunity to engage more with your way of teaching." Although she may not have been able to see the ongoing progress of student learning as a CRT, she was satisfied in her ability to teach the same content in a different way from the classroom teacher or teach different strategies that might appeal to the learning styles of some students. After one particular Science lesson with a Year 1 class on insects, she knew that her teaching made an impact when students "[saw] me on duty and they will come up and say they have seen a little animal and they start telling me [about it]." It confirmed to her that she inspired their curiosity and engaged them in learning during the brief time they spent together.

Alison believes that the school communities where she has worked have largely been supportive and committed to developing her as a teacher. Whilst working at different schools, she perceived a fundamental difference; some schools essentially viewed her as "replaceable," while other schools "don't see you as separate to the rest of the staff." Some schools had an invisible, but undeniable, hierarchy among teachers who were working on a

permanent, temporary or casual basis. Alison commented that she felt marginalised at these schools and she preferred to work at schools which she felt were more inclusive and collaborative. Eventually, she gained a part-time fixed term contract at her former practicum school where she was given access to professional learning opportunities. Alison knew she was a member of the school community when she was included with rest of the staff during school photo day.

When asked to represent her casual teaching experiences as a metaphor, she said that it was a "lucky dip" because "You never know what you're going to get on a given day. Sometimes it can be just what you're wanting and other days it is completely unexpected." Looking forward, Alison is considering applying for a permanent role once she arrives back from England in two years' time. In the long term, Alison knows it will beneficial for her to have the security of entitlements such as maternity and long service leave.

4.3 Becky

Becky worked as a day-to-day CRT at two different schools for one and a half years before being offered her current temporary role as a full-time classroom teacher. She is currently teaching a "safety net" class for students with behavioural challenges such as Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder and students on Individual Education Plans. She graduated with Bachelor of Arts/Bachelor of Education (Primary) in 2014 and went into casual teaching as a matter of necessity, to get her "foot in the door" of her chosen career.

Reflecting on her previous role as a CRT, Becky saw the main advantages were the variety of students she worked with and the novelty of teaching different groups of students on a daily basis. Also, compared to her current position as a full-time teacher replete with paperwork, assessments and reporting, she found casual teaching as having comparatively fewer responsibilities of "having to report and stressing out about long term things in the class." As

a CRT, Becky felt that she could teach the class for the day without the anxiety of fulfilling ongoing administrative requirements that are inherent when teaching with a full-time role.

During the course of her work as a CRT, she had gained and strengthened her skill of flexibility and improvisation. She learnt "to be really patient… Sometimes it's easier to visualise how the lesson is going to be, but it doesn't normally end up that way." There were instances where she had made mistakes; the lessons were derailed by events outside of her control and the content of the lesson triggered students' misbehaviour. When these events occurred, she accepted that "it's okay to just stop the lesson if it gets too rowdy and just do something else." Her teaching experiences enabled her to adapt as a teacher and accept that her day would not necessarily be perfect nor always run according to plan. Her repertoire of behaviour management skills also expanded as she taught students with diverse needs, personalities and academic abilities.

By working at two different schools, Becky was able to carefully observe the differences and similarities between school communities. She noticed that some schools prioritised the provision of physical resources and manipulatives for students, while others emphasised professional learning and specialised workshops to upskill staff. Her position as a CRT allowed her the distance to see that each school and its staff were "very different… the way they communicated and the strategies they used, the systems they used." She came to the conclusion that she preferred to work at a school where staff were given ample training for professional growth. By having open communication with the school about her booking availabilities and being consistent by building relationship with one school, she was able to secure a temporary full-time contract in her current role and is no longer teaching on a casual basis.

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Although Becky was unable to make long-term changes to schools as a CRT, she knew she made a significant impact as a teacher when she could focus on meeting the basic needs of each student. There was "…more headspace to actually focus on a student's wellbeing and stuff, because as a classroom teacher you might be a bit caught up with all the assessments and the reporting." Instead of solely focussing on meeting academic needs, "as a casual teacher… you can kind of step away from that and see the student for how they feel that day." She gave an example of asking students what they ate for recess and lunch so that they were feeling well enough to learn during the day and on one occasion she asked the canteen to provide lunch for a student who did not bring any food.

Becky commented that the most rewarding aspect of working as a CRT was being able to show her personality in front of the students. She found that students tended to be influenced by her mood, because "They know that… you are less stressed than their classroom teacher, so they enjoy your company a bit more." Showing her sense of humour allowed her to quickly build rapport with students, and created an environment where they enjoyed being taught by her for the day. Her philosophy underpinning casual teaching was expressed in the metaphor of her being a "gardener" and the students being "plants." Although the classroom teacher is the regular gardener and grows plants in a certain way, "… as a casual teacher you're still watering the plant… you're putting it in a slightly different environment and then hoping that the plant will still go." Despite the challenges and anxieties she faced with her role, Becky did not regret the experiences of being a CRT and building relationships with students that she taught.

4.4 Chloe

Chloe graduated with a Bachelor of Arts/Bachelor of Education (Primary) in 2014. Shortly after graduation, she was offered a full-time contract as a Kindergarten teacher for one term.

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After this contract expired, she worked as a CRT out of necessity for about one and a half years. She is currently a full-time temporary teacher at her local primary school where she previously worked on a casual basis.

Chloe expressed that one advantage of being a CRT was the level of experimentation she had over her teaching methods. If she assessed that students were ready for lessons which involved greater lateral thinking, freedom or practical learning than what the classroom teacher usually provided, she took those risks. The advantage was that "if the lesson was not a success, then it's not really a big deal, because it was just a one off opportunity to see the results." Thus, she had opportunities to take calculated pedagogical risks without being concerned about alignment with the curriculum or what specific outcomes were being targeted. She also believed that it was beneficial for students to be taught by someone other than their classroom teacher because the CRT offers a different voice, presence and pedagogy. Having a CRT in the classroom with new lessons can have a positive impact upon students because it can be "draining to go on the same content every single day."

As a CRT, Chloe felt it was paramount that she quickly gained a sense of how the classroom operated, how students responded to her behaviour management techniques and how to deliver the lesson content to maximise their engagement. She commented that all teachers "have to be very good at responding to children and how to read their behaviours… or regulate them in order for them to listen and learn the content." She also emphasised the importance of flexibility, especially since she had to be prepared to teach all stages across Kindergarten to Year Six at a moment's notice. It was overwhelming at times to begin the day without adequate information about the class she was teaching and at those times she felt as if she was "teaching in a vacuum [because] you don't really know what's going on." She had to adapt by quickly learning classroom rules and routines to minimise disruptions to student learning. To Chloe, casual teaching was like "guiding a wave… because you don't

know how high the tide would be and you have to just go along for whatever the day will throw at you."

Her position as a CRT enabled Chloe some insights into different schools and how they operate as communities. In particular, she noticed that "the staff's attitude towards working as a collegial group has significant impacts on how they teach the kids and also the general school culture and climate." She observed how schools where staff collaboration was practised and valued had an overall calmer and well-organised environment than those schools where collaboration operated only at a superficial level. Chloe also discussed how opportunities for mentoring varied greatly between different schools. Staff in some schools offered her informal support by giving her an overview of learning methods effective for the class she was allocated or providing information about students with special needs. However, there were no opportunities during her time as a CRT to gain formal mentoring from experienced colleagues. Some schools also invited her to attend staff meetings, staff development days and professional learning opportunities, while other schools intentionally assigned her bus duties during meetings or staff development because "they thought of it as just a permanent staff event."

Chloe believed that she made a contribution to the schools where she taught by using initiative to ensure the day was running as smoothly as possible. One of her goals as a CRT was to maintain the school's regular routine, so they do not "feel like their day is interrupted just because somebody new has come in." For example, she volunteered to take groups of students for Science rotations across all Stage 2 classes as scheduled, even though she arrived that morning without instructions on what to do with the students. Also, on days she was booked to replace a staff member on excursions or sports carnivals, she ensured that she was proactively assisting the other teachers. Through these proactive actions to assist and make

her presence known, she has successfully secured a temporary full-time contract at her preferred school.

Overall, Chloe felt valued by some school communities, often because of small gestures of appreciation: for example, she valued being called by name by a principal, engaging in informal conversations with staff members and being emailed a short message at Christmas thanking her for the work she had done at the school. She commented that the more she worked at certain schools, the more included she felt within their community and overtime she stopped "feeling like a random stranger walking in the door," thus moving from a boundary of school community towards the centre as a full-time teacher.

4.5 David

David graduated with a Bachelor of Education (Primary) in 2014 and started as a CRT in early 2017 after a two year break. He submitted his CV to 25 schools in his local area and several schools offered him work. After six months working regularly as a CRT, he was offered his current temporary role as a full-time teacher on a Year 4 class at a school where he had previously worked on a casual basis.

As a CRT, David enjoyed being able to teach students for the day, then coming home without planning for work the following day or week. Initially, it was a steep learning curve when he entered the classroom without a clear idea of lessons to be taught. However, he commented that "After you do it a few times, you really get a good idea of what you do when you first turn up… You know straight away the steps to get yourself ready for the day." Therefore, he was able to adapt routines for himself in preparation for the teaching day ahead. With adaptability as his strength, he enjoyed working across different schools with a diverse student cohort. He worked with "a lot of students that have a lot of different personalities; that could be cultural differences, it could be social differences, economic differences." By

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working with distinct student populations, he gained a wide variety of behaviour management skills and techniques to build rapport with students.

David reported that another advantage of working as a CRT was the opportunity to observe how different teachers foster positive behaviours for learning. He gained insight into "Preparation and how [teachers] laid out the classroom, worksheets that they've used and all sorts of things. That's really powerful later when you can teach full time." By working as a CRT and observing different teachers, he also developed his own philosophy of teaching that he now applies to his current role as a classroom teacher. He believes that a good teacher "needs to like the idea of education" and must be passionate about what they are doing. He had encountered teachers who "…don't care too much. They'll do minimal amount of work and that's enough for them, because they see that they can tick some boxes and that the students have a basic understanding," and he would like to avoid becoming a similar type of teacher.

By working at different schools, David gained an overall sense of how each school community operated. He found that, "The schools that worked well, all the staff were engaged and they all worked together and talked to each other in the staffroom." Other schools which did not function as a collaborative team tended to be disorganised and lacked communication among staff. Schools also varied with the level of support they provided for him. Some schools gave him a brief induction, including a map of the school and the keys to access classrooms. In others, "it was pretty much assumed that you know how it would work and you just kept on going with it."

Although David couldn't make official changes to school policy or make any long-lasting impact on how schools were run, he believed he made a significant impression on the classes he taught by explicitly going over routines and expected behaviour such as "[students] lining

up in two lines, making sure the children go to class as a group, making sure they know to listen to instructions." These micro changes allowed him to manage students in accordance with his own expectations as a teacher. He also knew his work was valued when he was asked back to work by a particular school. He commented that "if you just politely turn up on time and you do a good job, the schools will call you back [and] you know that they value your work. Otherwise, you wouldn't be asked back." These "call-backs" were fundamental to building his affinity with the school community and allowed him to move from the boundary of schools as a newcomer, to a regular CRT, to now a contracted full-time teacher on a Year 4 class.

When asked to capture the casual teaching experience in a metaphor, David stated, "Casual teachers need to be as flexible and resilient as a leaf in the wind." He elaborated by saying that despite windy conditions, the leaf must stay intact and go with the flow, whilst guiding its own way through the journey.

4.6 Ethan

Ethan was the most experienced CRT of all the participants in this study. He graduated with a Bachelor of Education majoring in Physical Development/Health/Physical Education (PDHPE) in 2007 and has been working as a CRT for about a decade. He also worked part-time with a company which outsources PDHPE-trained employees to teach fitness to students at various schools in New South Wales. He has worked as a CRT across approximately 30 different schools and has visited hundreds of schools in his part-time role with the company.

Being a CRT had the advantage of flexibility for Ethan to work multiple jobs at once. Another main advantage he saw was "going to different classrooms, working with different children, [and] teaching different things." Being able to work in diverse school environments meant he was exposed to situations involving students with vast variety of needs, abilities and

behaviours. He identified his key strength as "just being able to find the common ground and what works within those schools" whilst fulfilling his role as a teacher. Fostering rapport with the students was one of the key goals he had to ensure a successful day across all schools he taught at, including schools located in low socioeconomic areas. He found it rewarding to build trust with "children that were more difficult to work with," and he emphasised praise or positive verbal feedback as the foundation to his behaviour management strategy. Ultimately, he wanted to build students' confidence so they "feel quite good about themselves." This personal philosophy was encapsulated by his motto, "praise is the key to success."

When asked about whether or not he made any impact to the school communities as a CRT, Ethan stated, "I think I've definitely had a positive impact for the majority of the time." For example, his presence and "just having a different voice in the classroom" acted as a catalyst for students to learn the same content in a novel way. He also emphasised modelling appropriate behaviours and manners to create a classroom environment where there is "equal opportunity for everyone to learn." Once he had gained students' respect and control of the classroom, he was able to teach new skills that were not necessarily used by their classroom teacher: for example, he utilised his PDHPE training to teach a volleyball lesson, explicitly showing students technical skills which "definitely paid dividends in their accuracy and consistency." He reflected on his own experiences and noted that all CRTs have a role to play in schools and that they are a necessary and valuable part of their day-to-day operation. During the working day, he was "always making little changes, whether they're formal or informal." This included teaching Year 2 students a new strategy to monitor their reading and check for their own understanding and implementing new sport programs for schools where he had worked.

School communities have largely been supportive throughout his years as a CRT. However, Ethan commented that he had only been given formal mentors, induction and professional

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learning opportunities while on blocks. As a CRT, the expectation is that of independence and taking the initiative to ask for help if you need it. Schools are "obviously a very busy, diverse place: it's fit in very quickly if you can." There were several occasions when he was given informal induction from the Deputy or Assistant Principal outlining school procedures and rules, but most of the time "you're sort of left to your own devices." Thus, the expectation was largely that of self-reliance.

Ethan concluded the interview by stating that "casual teaching is a wonderful grounding" for all teachers, including those who are looking for security of a full-time position in the future. He perceived casual teaching as a unique professional experience that offers variety and diversity, compared to the monotony of working within a single school and/or class. Despite the inherent challenges of casual teaching, he asserted that being able to encounter different classrooms and their students had given him opportunities to learn key skills along the way. Ethan continues to seek new challenges in his role and believes in making a positive impact on the diverse student cohorts that he teaches.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter provided a profile for each participant which outlined their experiences as CRTs. It used direct quotes to highlight their different perspectives about their role and the school communities in which they worked. The next chapter examines the results further by analysing common themes across participants' responses and situates the findings of the present study within the broader existing research literature on CRTs.

<div align="center">Chapter 5: Discussion</div>

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview and analysis of results. Five major themes have emerged through analysis of participant responses in interviews using NVivo software.

The themes are:

> Casual teaching as a necessity or choice.
> Skills gained as a result of casual teaching.
> Advantages of being a CRT.
> The perceived impact and/or value of their work.
> Learning about and within school communities.

Each theme is explored in detail and compared with other studies outlined in the literature review to investigate the extent to which this study confirms or contradicts the findings within current literature. This chapter aims to evaluate the significance of the researcher's study in relation to previous studies and examine whether it provides new perspectives in relation to pre-existing research.

5.2 Link to theoretical lens: legitimate peripheral participation

The results of this study relate to Lave and Wenger's (1991) model of learning as a situated social act within a community of practice. Each school can be viewed as a community with its own routines, rituals and rules. Newcomers must learn these unique aspects of a community by practising these routines and making meaningful contributions to the community's overall goals. This process of situated learning at the boundary of the community is known as legitimate peripheral participation. The participants in this study were newcomers to the schools they have initially approached. As they familiarised themselves with the schools, they participated in the broad "curriculum" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 93) created by the school community and moved slowly from the periphery of the community towards the centre. For some participants, their extended status as learners and legitimate participators gave them "…opportunities to make the culture of practice theirs" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 95) through complex processes of interaction, dialogue and engagement. At the time of the interviews, four participants were situated at a single school community on a full or part-time basis. These participants felt more comfortable to make

changes and reported greater affinity with the school community, reflecting Lave and Wenger's (1991) view that "An apprentice's contributions to ongoing activity gain value in practice – a value which increases as the apprentice becomes more adept" (p. 111). The following sections further examine participants' experience with situated learning and legitimate peripheral participation within school communities as a CRT.

5.3 Casual teaching as a necessity or choice

The interviews revealed that participants had varying reasons for working as a CRT. Three CRTs willingly chose to work on a casual basis because it afforded them flexibility to travel, study, or run their own part-time business. The remaining two participants worked as CRTs out of necessity as a means to gain teaching experience before obtaining temporary or permanent roles. Jenkins et al. (2009) reported that despite Education graduates desiring a full-time permanent position after leaving university, the reality was that as many as one-third of graduates found themselves in casual employment characterised by "a very demanding type of teaching that involves a lack of permanency, status and support" (p. 66). This was confirmed by two participants who reported that their employment as a CRT was not a choice, it was a prerequisite experience towards a more permanent role because they had to "start somewhere" (Becky). Similar results by Bamberry (2011) showed that 11 out of 20 CRTs she interviewed had described their role as the "only option" or work that they "fell into" (p. 56). However, Bamberry did not delve into why the other nine participants she interviewed made deliberate decisions to work on a casual basis. There is a current gap in research about CRTs who have willingly chosen their roles, why they had decided on this professional path, and whether or not they find the role rewarding. This study is significant in beginning to fill this gap by revealing these relatively unexplored areas of CRTs' choice for work.

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5.4 Skills gained as a result of casual teaching

In the interview, participants were asked the question, "What strengths have you developed during the course of your work?" Their responses were analysed using NVivo software and categorised as sub-themes below. The sub-themes are examined in light of previous literature about the experience of CRTs.

5.4.1   Adaptability and flexibility

All five participants during the interview had indicated that casual teaching imbued them with the ability to respond to unexpected situations which arose during the course of their day. It was important for Chloe to "just [be] able to do whatever it is that they throw at you and being ready for whatever stage and schedule and routine the school, the class and the kids are partaking in." Similar sentiments were expressed by all participants, who stated that casual teaching developed their confidence to become "a stronger and more confident teacher" (Alison) as they learnt to adapt to unforeseen classroom events, unexpected student behaviours or changes in lesson plans.

This study supports previous research such as those by Charteris et al. (2015) that CRTs face the demanding task of adapting with many different classrooms and school communities. Adaptability was considered by participants as an important facet for CRTs to develop as they confronted unpredictability over where they worked, who they taught and what lessons to teach. As they became increasingly adept at adjusting to change, their confidence as CRTs grew. It also supported a finding that CRTs were most confident in delivering effective classroom activities and planning lessons for diverse needs of learners (Nicholas & Wells, 2016). These skills were also identified as strengths by participants in this study, exemplifying their abilities to apply flexibility within their pedagogy in an unpredictable professional environment.

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5.4.2   Behaviour management strategies

All participants spoke about the importance of managing student behaviour in the classes that they taught. This study has confirmed findings such as those by Driedger-Enns (2014), Botempo and Deay (1986) and Lunay and Lock (2006) that behaviour management was a priority for CRTs to effectively deliver lesson content. When participants encountered students with challenging behaviours, they used appropriate strategies such as asking administrators for assistance, attempting to build rapport with the student, or being firm in letting students know that a boundary had been crossed. However, some participants commented on the difficulty of not knowing "how you should respond to their behaviours and what they will respond to" (Alison). There was also an issue of lacking legitimacy as a CRT, because "Sometimes no matter what you do, as a casual teacher, they know that they can get away with stuff" (David). Participants found it vital to assert their authority whilst building positive relationships with all students. Both the existing literature (e.g. Jenkins et al., 2009; Clifton & Rambaran, 1987) and this study have concurred that managing behaviour can prove challenging to CRTs because of students' perception that they hold relatively less authority than classroom teachers.

On the other hand, three participants stated that casual teaching had strengthened their behaviour management skills because of their exposure to many different students across multiple schools. As a CRT, "…you deal with so many different children [so] you kind of learn what they're scared of and what you can do to get them to shut up sometimes" (Becky). Thus for some participants, they grew in their abilities to manage student behaviour during the course of their work as a CRT.

There were also points of contrast between some of the main findings in previous research and this study in terms of behaviour management: for example, Driedger-Enns (2014) reported that her participant had to present a façade as a teacher and that their personality was

not presented to the class to maintain student control. Conversely, this study found that some participants made a conscious effort to bring their personalities to the forefront in order to establish positive relationships with students and model desired behaviour. Two participants found that by showing aspects of themselves such as humour and cheerfulness, students usually responded positively which assisted in creating an environment of respect and learning.

5.4.3   Initiative

A common theme across all participants was the necessity to independently ask for help from staff if they needed it, rather than waiting for help to be offered. Schools were fast-paced and busy which often resulted to participants being "left to [their] own devices" (Chloe and David) and "stand[ing] on your own two feet" (David) after a brief induction. The participants spoke of asking for informal help from a "buddy teacher" (Chloe) in the neighbouring classroom, or using initiative to "access different teachers and see if they can help you out" (Ethan). Previous studies have reported hesitance on the part of CRTs to seek assistance from other staff for the fear of appearing incompetent (Papatrianou & Cornu, 2014), leading to feelings of alienation from the wider school community and its support networks (Nicholas & Wells, 2016). However, this was not the case for participants in the present study who willingly asked for informal help from relevant staff and administrators, even if the unspoken expectation was that they were to learn about the school and its students independently without thorough or formal induction. Thus, they took practical actions to move from a newcomer of a school community to a full participant (Lave & Wenger, 1991) by seeking clarifications, learning about the school culture, and participating in rituals inside and outside of the classroom.

Another aspect of initiative was the participants' ability to assist staff without being explicitly asked: for example, David helped staff unpack boxes for Mother's Day at a school whilst he

was a CRT. He commented that "The Deputy Principal was really impressed that I just did that on my own." Similarly, Chloe spoke of volunteering to attend Primary Schools Sports Association (PSSA) sports to referee matches, taking on an extra playground duty, or "just putting up [her] hand for whatever areas that could help the school community." These contributions, whether small or large, reveal participants' ability and willingness to take the initiative for the benefit of the school and its staff. Thus, this study adds complexity to previous research which concluded that CRTs are "disposable resources, marginalized in the workplace, with no voice" (Bamberry, 2011, p. 54) and are reliant upon the school community to offer them adequate support (Kelly et al., 2014). While the previous findings may still be relevant, this study revealed that some CRTs are capable of making a meaningful impact within schools using their personal and professional resources and are self-assured to seek informal support.

5.5 Advantages of working as a CRT

Participants reflected on the positive aspects of working on a casual basis, addressing the research question of the advantages the role of casual teaching offers. Section 5.5.1 of this chapter focusses on advantages for CRTs themselves in working on a casual basis. Section 5.5.2 outlines advantages for students being taught by CRTs.

5.5.1   Advantages for CRTs working on a casual basis

The participants revealed that there were positive aspects of being employed as a CRT. Two participants (Becky and David) started their careers as CRTs before gaining temporary full-time work, and were able to reflect on the advantageous nature of casual teaching in comparison to full-time roles.

5.5.1.1 Interaction with a diverse student cohort

One main point of difference between full-time teachers and CRTs is the number of students they teach throughout the school calendar. Instead of working at a single school and classroom, participants were exposed to "different schools, personalities and students." This exposure was seen by David and Ethan as a powerful tool for future work opportunities. Ethan also cited this as an advantage when he stated that casual teaching "…allows you to experience different students, different ages, different cultures, whereas if you're just stuck in one place it can get monotonous." Becky also revealed that her repertoire of behaviour management skills have expanded as a result of being exposed to many classroom situations, each with unique student personalities and academic abilities. David reflected that he developed strategies to build rapport and form bonds with students both in the classroom and out on playground duty through working with distinct student populations. Thus, some participants saw advantages in the transient, but diverse, nature of casual teaching.

5.5.1.2 Developing personal philosophy of teaching

Although participants did not explicitly mention the development of teaching philosophy as an advantage of casual teaching, it was clear from their responses that their work has contributed substantially to their reflections on how they want to teach and what kind of teacher they aspire to be. David expressed his personal philosophy that "I think to be a good teacher… you need to believe that you can instil that idea of learning" to students. Other participants implicitly expressed their philosophy of teaching through statements such as "I really pride myself on trying to give everybody an equal opportunity" (Ethan) and "…if the kids have been well-behaved, the work has been completed and the kid were engaged, I think that is an indicator that that was a good casual day" (Alison). They were able to develop their own definitions of what makes a good teacher and what factors define a positive teaching day with their students. The participants did not merely "replicate the performances of others or by acquiring knowledge transmitted in instruction," but situated themselves at multiple

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schools and engaged in "centripetal participation in the learning curriculum of the ambient community" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 100). By fully taking part in the activities of school communities as legitimate peripheral members, they had the advantage of learning who they were as teachers. This is a powerful process, because ultimately, "…learning and a sense of identity are inseparable: They are the aspects of the same phenomenon" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 115). Through situating themselves in school communities, participants had the opportunity of formulating their professional identities across multiple school settings. However, there is a noticeable gap in existing literature about the potential for CRTs to reflect upon the kind of teacher they desire to become whilst being exposed to a myriad of school communities and students.

5.5.1.3 Work-life balance

Three participants nominated adequate work-life balance as an advantage of casual teaching. In particular, participants who started as CRTs and are now engaged in full-time roles reflected that "The good thing [about casual teaching] was just not having the responsibility of having to report and stressing out about long term things with the class" (Becky). The difficulty of being a classroom teacher was that if "…the lesson was a failure, then I am set back on my program, or I feel like it was a waste of a lesson" (Chloe). As a CRT, participants felt that there were broader opportunities for experimentation, exploration and risk-taking in their lesson delivery, which can be restricted as a classroom teacher due to curriculum and time constraints. Studies such as Bamberry (2011) and Kivunja et al. (2008) concur, finding that casual teaching "allows teachers to engage with staff and students without the burden of ongoing responsibilities" (Bamberry, 2011, p. 54).

5.5.2 Advantages for students who are taught by CRTs

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According to participants, students also benefitted from their presence. It was seen as beneficial for students to be exposed to different teachers from their regular classroom teacher to provide multiple ways of learning skills and content.

5.5.2.1 Impact on student learning

By the very nature of their work, CRTs can find it difficult to observe students' academic and social progress over time (Brown, Kelder, Freeman, & Carr, 2013). The participants in this study indicated that despite this inherent challenge, they were able to make a positive impact on students' learning in significant ways. All five participants expressed that an advantage of working as a CRT lay in the fact that they brought something different from the classroom teacher. This included being able to use their background training in PDHPE to "teach skills in a certain way [and] seeing results very quickly on the back of that" (Ethan), improving students' written work through teaching "skills of asking critical questions when writing" (David), and introducing a novel way to make art by "play[ing] with marshmallows and using that" (Becky). These responses counter earlier studies which posited that "this form of [casual] work is sometimes seen as having little value in career terms… [it] can be seen as a highly demanding form of labour that offers participants little job satisfaction" (Brown et al., 2013, p. 6). Participants in this present study found advantages in being able to make a small, but significant, contribution upon student learning, behaviour and routine.

However, it is worth noting that some participants were aware of the limits they had as a CRT in making a meaningful impact on students. Two participants expressed that "…if I have a class that are not responsive, then I wouldn't say I make a significant impact on their day" (Chloe) and that "…it really depends on the students in each class. You definitely can have an impact, but it's really varied" (David). Thus, although all participants were able to give specific examples on positive impacts they made upon students, they recognised that it is not

always possible to make significant progress on student learning due to factors that are beyond their control.

5.5.2.2 Rapport with students

Four participants explicitly commented on building student rapport as one of the main impacts they had on students over their time as CRTs. Establishing positive relationships was a valuable way to connect with the school community and its students. David gave an example of "…when students know your name and you've never taught them before. You know there's some connection there that's been really powerful, because you have never seen them or taught them before." From these brief interactions on the playground, David was able to establish an affinity with students from multiple classes whom he had not directly taught. Another example of building rapport was from Becky, who said "During literacy groups I would make jokes, or you know, make them laugh… It's just small things like that." These informal interactions between participants and large cohort of students they worked with enabled participants to view their work as valuable and meaningful, despite the transient nature of their role. Shilling (1991) acknowledges that it is possible to make meaningful relationships with schools and students if they "work in a single or limited number of schools" (p. 6). However, there appears to be a gap in research about the unique advantage CRTs have to make connections with many different students across multiple schools.

5.5.2.3 Novelty of a different teacher

All participants reflected on their novel presence in the school as a means to make an impact upon the students they taught. For the students, "…it's interesting to have another person come in and do something with them" (Alison). This sentiment was echoed by Becky, who recounted how a Kindergarten class she taught appreciated her unique sense of humour and practical lessons, which contrasted the classroom teacher's presence and pedagogy. The

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participants found that they had impact upon students by "providing different learning experiences to kids" (Ethan) that were unique from those of the classroom teachers with whom students usually interacted. Although the CRTs were not considered as experienced experts in their school communities, "…the initial, partial contributions of apprentices are useful" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 111) Thus, all teachers have the potential to contribute meaningfully to school communities; CRTs have the additional advantage of being able to contribute their knowledge and skills across multiple schools and classrooms.

The novelty of a CRT in the classroom was reported by Clifton and Rambaran (1987) as a negative impediment, because "Some regular teachers use techniques and procedures that are not congruent with the principles and procedures substitute teachers have learned in their university training. Such a difference can create problems in the classroom" (p. 321). However, the participants in this study perceived this incongruence as a valuable asset to their practice and one of the main advantages in building rapport with students. Thus, there are potential advantages for students to be taught by CRTs in addition to their classroom teacher; students can build new relationships with another adult figure and be exposed to multiple ways of learning. The implication is that for schools to thrive, they must be supportive of their CRTs and see having different teachers in their communities as a valuable asset rather than a disruption to their usual routines.

5.6 Learning about the school community

This section addresses the research question about what participants have learnt through their position on the boundary of school communities. Participants have indicated that they were able to learn about distinctive aspects of school communities through involving themselves as peripheral community members. The following sections further expand on their responses.

5.6.1   Level of collaboration between staff

Three participants responded that whilst working at multiple schools, one noticeable difference was the level of collaboration practised between staff and executive members. Informal means of collaboration such as conversations in the staffroom were observed by participants. Two participants also observed that collaborative schools tended to apply school-wide behaviour policies with consistent expectations of appropriate behaviours for all students, regardless of the teacher. For schools that did not thrive on collaboration, there was a sense of "chaos" (Chloe), "disorganisation" and "[staff] being tired or not being enthusiastic" (David). Thus, participants reported both positive and negative experiences associated with different school communities. This finding is in alignment with Jenkins, Smith, and Maxwell (2009) who concluded that "Schools receive their casuals differently. They can create positive experiences associated with casual work by being well-organised and supportive" (p. 69). The importance of schools' organisation was echoed by David who stated that well-run schools have "a pro forma, like maps of the school [and] sheets of how the school runs. Every school should do it, but in reality, it doesn't happen." The implication is that schools can maximise the effectiveness of their CRTs by maintaining cohesive and organised community of practice.

5.6.2 Access to mentoring/ professional learning sessions/ inductions/ meetings

Schools varied widely in the extent to which they allowed CRTs access to professional learning opportunities and mentoring, as well as formal induction programs and invitations to attend meetings. None of the participants in the present study were allocated formal mentors or afforded official professional learning opportunities whilst they were CRTs. It was only during blocks or on a temporary position that they had these opportunities, reflecting the findings by McCormack and Thomas (2005) which showed a low percentage of CRTs in primary school being offered professional support due to "lack of continuity [and] the absence of ongoing support network" (p. 25). Their recommendation for principals to

"…ensure that their casual beginning teachers are given the same opportunity for… linkage to mentors as their permanent peers" (p. 30) have seemingly remained unfulfilled twelve years after publication.

In terms of induction, participants reported that some schools provided brief introductions with vital information about the school such as "…a map, where you need to sign on, the class roll if there's a folder and the keys if you need the keys" (David). However, for some schools "…it's just honestly a text message to a school you have never been to and then they just tell you what class you're on and that's it" (Chloe), reflecting the lack of information given to new CRTs upon arrival. Most participants found that they were welcome to attend staff meetings in schools because "nobody really shoos you away" (Chloe). However, Alison was told by the deputy principal at one school, "…Next time you're here and there's a staff meeting, just take your first aid kit and vest and go to the classroom." Ultimately, it appears that it is up to individual schools to grant CRTs access to induction programs and staff meetings. Participants who were asked to leave staff meetings, or were not invited to the meetings in the first place, reported experiencing feelings of disappointment, insecurity and isolation from the school community. These forms of CRT alienation have also been widely reported in existing literature (e.g. Lunay & Lock, 2006; McCormack & Thomas, 2005; Rogers, 1995) and point to the need for CRTs to gain increased access to professional support. Learning involves full legitimate participation in the sociocultural practices of school communities (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and this proves difficult when CRTs are denied these opportunities to participate in practices that are an inherent part of schools' operations.

5.6.3   Observing other staff and their classrooms

Some participants gained valuable insights into how different classrooms operated and were able to add these strategies as part of their pedagogical toolkit. Alison reflected that "…you kind of see what's working for each school [so] when I go into having my own classroom, I

can then employ that in my practice." Chloe also took advantage of teaching in multiple classroom settings by "…collecting ideas of what other teachers are doing and also gauge and feel how different schools do things differently and take the best out of each school." David also collected valuable information such as "preparation [of resources], how they've laid out the classroom, and worksheets they've used" for future use. These statements reflect participants' ability to collect relevant skills and information to build their foundations as a teacher. Related to this observation is Lave and Wenger's (1991) idea that "…peripherality, when it is enabled, suggests an opening, a way of gaining access to sources for understanding through growing involvement" to full participation (p. 37). Through their position as legitimate peripheral participants, the CRTs were able to gain access to resources which furthered their understanding of norms and practices as teachers within a school community. However, there remains a gap in current literature about how casual teaching enables teachers to collect, and eventually use, valuable pedagogical resources from many different classroom contexts and teachers.

5.6.4 CRTs' relationships with the school community

Participants were asked to reflect on their relationships with school communities and what they have learnt about ways to sustain these relationships. Participants reported that one way schools built relationships with them involved informal positive feedback from a member of staff or higher administrators such as the principal or deputy principal. Brief words of support by executive staff such as "Good job, keep going, [and] do what you do" (Becky) and "My kids had a great day with you" (Alison) have allowed participants to feel that their work had an impact, and that they are recognised within the school community as a valued employee rather than being an invisible and powerless outsider. These small gestures have contributed to participants' perceptions about which schools appreciate CRTs.

Much of existing literature (e.g. Brown et al., 2013; Jenkins et al., 2009; Cardon, 2002) have reported participants experiencing alienation from school communities through an entrenched climate of "marginalisation, lack of respect, not being valued and being discriminated against" (Brown et al., 2013, p. 12). Four out of five participants in this study also reported that some schools saw them as "replaceable" (Alison), or that they "didn't get the experience of welcoming or hello" (David). However, all five participants have established themselves into school communities with which they have a personal affinity. At these schools, they have been receiving regular and often on-going teaching work. This shift was possible when participants demonstrated the ability to discern which schools were best suited to their personal teaching philosophy. They also utilised their position on the boundary to observe which schools were supportive of CRTs and other teachers and thus best provided their needs to thrive professionally. Participants proactively built relationships with these schools by "just being consistent" (Becky) and "showing you are reliable" (Chloe) with fulfilling bookings. By being present, punctual and professional, the participants found that it was possible to "feel that sense of belonging within schools" (Chloe) as they engaged with school practices and personnel. This process of familiarising themselves with schools and its staff allowed participants working on the boundaries of school communities to make transitions towards its centre.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter explored the main themes which have emerged from the results of this study, with links to participants' responses during the semi-structured interviews. It also examined this study in light of existing literature about the work of CRTs and started to fill the gaps in literature about advantageous nature of casual teaching. The next section summarises the key findings of this study, outlines its limitations, suggest implications for both CRTs and school communities from this study, and recommends potential directions for future research.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises the key findings of this study in relation to the posed research

questions. It also discusses the significance of this study and its potential impact on various

stakeholders, including CRTs. The limitations will be outlined and suggestions for future

research provide a direction for further exploration of this topic.

6.2 Summary of findings

There were several key findings from this study, which are summarised below.

6.2.1 How and what have the participants learnt about their professional strengths through their work as CRTs?

Through their position as CRTs, the participants strengthened their flexibility to teach across all stage levels and Key Learning Areas at a short notice; developed a wide range of behaviour management strategies to establish positive learning environment for all students; and utilised initiative to give and ask for assistance if required. These key strengths evolved from CRTs' participation within school communities and willingness to immerse themselves in multiple schools and their diverse cultures.

6.2.2 Do participants perceive they make a contribution to school communities as a CRT? If so, what is the nature of that contribution?

Participants in this study indicated that they were able to make meaningful contributions to the school communities with whom they worked on a casual basis. They emphasised the importance of taking initiative to give assistance with school-wide activities such as excursions, Mother's Day open school exhibitions and athletics carnivals. Participants were also able to make micro changes to students' routine through explicit behavioural expectations in alignment with their own philosophy of teaching. Although it was not always possible for them to observe the progression of students' learning over time, the CRTs felt that their presence and pedagogy contributed to students' learning of skills and content.

6.2.3 What are the advantages of working as a CRT?

This study found that despite the challenges of working as a CRT, participants were proactively able to use flexibility and adaptability to respond to unanticipated challenges in the classroom. Casual teaching has also informed their personal philosophy of effective teaching and consolidated their behaviour management strategies through teaching a diverse cohort of students.

Participants also saw unique advantages to being a CRT. They largely enjoyed the diversity which underpins their role. It was found that despite the instability of their roles, they were able to make an impacts upon student behaviour, routines and learning. They also learnt to use their initiative in contributing to the school communities to ensure that staff and students were not disrupted by their presence. The novelty of having a different teacher in the classroom was also perceived by participants to be positive for students because it provided a change from their regular lesson content and routines.

6.3 Significance of study

This study contributes to the existing body of literature by exploring the nature of casual relief teaching from those who have firsthand experience of this unique role. In particular, this study has highlighted how participants have adapted to their work, developed confidence in their teaching methods, involved themselves in school communities and made contributions towards student learning and development. The positive aspects of casual teaching remain largely unexplored within previous existing literature; this study therefore offers an alternative view which includes a perspective of the advantages and affordances of casual relief teaching for themselves, the students they teach and the school communities within which they work.

It is also significant in recognising the contributions made by growing number of CRTs working within NSW schools. This study has highlighted that each CRT, regardless of their level of teaching experience, strive to make meaningful contributions which allow schools to remain in operation. It has advanced the knowledge of why CRTs are important and how they operate within diverse school communities.

6.4 Limitations

The major limitation of this study was the small sample size of participants and resulting implications for generalisability of collected data. Although the findings may be relevant for participants in this study, they cannot be applied generally to a wider CRT population. The participants were also known to the researcher, which may have skewed the results if they were reticent to disclose some information for the fear of affecting our personal relationship.

The study also only used one method (semi-structured interviews) to collect data, which may have compromised the robustness of this study. The interviews were only conducted once with each participant and did not explore longitudinal impacts of casual teaching due to time constraints. The lack of other data resources also meant it was not possible to corroborate responses given by the participants, relying on their self-reports only.

6.5 Implications for CRTs

This study highlights the implication for CRTs in how they can effectively perform their work and meaningfully contribute to school communities to get the most out of their role. It reveals the need for CRTs to take some initiative in assisting schools and asking for help if required. Active participation was one of the main ways in which CRTs in this study were able to learn schools' routines, rules and procedures. CRTs must also recognise that their presence, background knowledge and skills are significant in improving students' learning outcomes, even if they cannot usually see any long-term progression in students' achievement. Finally, it was clear from this study that CRTs need to build rapport with school communities by participating as much as possible in their routines and special events, both within and outside of the classroom. It appears that participants felt a greater sense of belonging and connectedness with a school where they received consistent work because they were able to familiarise themselves with the community through sustained participation.

6.6 Implications for schools

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This study also reveals implications for school communities who wish to ensure the effectiveness of CRTs are maximised. Schools need to recognise that their environment has a strong impact upon the abilities of CRTs to successfully carry out their work. In particular, they must provide basic forms of induction to orient new CRTs to the school and, where possible, offer CRTs informal or formal mentors who can give assistance when needed. Classroom teachers should be encouraged to provide lesson plans and appropriate materials to conduct the lessons, as well as a brief overview of student profiles, classroom management strategies and relevant rules and procedures. In this way, CRTs are more able to adjust to the classroom environment and make meaningful contributions to student learning. Schools must also practise collaboration between all staff, including CRTs, to build a supportive community. Without this collaboration, disorganisation becomes apparent in schools' operations, which can limit the effectiveness of CRTs in adjusting to schools.

6.7 Implications for further research

The findings from this study raises important issues for future research. Firstly, it is worthwhile to recruit a greater number of CRTs, with purposeful recruitment of participants based on gender and years of experience as CRTs, to compare whether these factors influence their experience.

Methodological changes are another consideration. It may be beneficial for future studies to utilise additional qualitative and/or quantitative methods to create a more detailed analysis of participant responses. In particular, case studies with the inclusion of observation may be a relevant method to build a more holistic understanding of participants' experiences as CRTs.

Another suggestion for future research is to examine the impact of CRTs on students by investigating the experience of students who have been taught by CRTs. It may provide an alternative angle of research whereby students are questioned about what impacts (if any)

CRTs have made on their academic progress or personal wellbeing. This is significant towards understanding students' perspectives of the contributions made by CRTs on their learning, which is a notable gap in current literature.

Another potential direction is a longitudinal study of CRTs at different stages of their career. The study could take place over the first five years of Education graduates as they enter the teaching workforce as CRTs to investigate whether their perception and experiences of casual teaching vary over time as they transition from a newcomer to a full member of a school community.

The study can also be broadened to encompass the perspectives of participants who started their careers as CRTs and are subsequently in permanent teaching positions. It might offer interesting insights to explore their impressions of working as a CRT in comparison to their current role and investigate any significant differences in their experience. Another avenue for research is including pre-service teachers in the study to explore their views of casual teaching as it is likely they will start their careers as CRTs after graduation.

It is also recommended that future research include school principals and/or deputy principals, administrators from government education departments and other policy makers who hire CRTs and are responsible for their work to gain their insights into how CRTs can be best supported.

6.8 Conclusion

This chapter provided a summary of the main findings from this study and has outlined its significance, limitations and potential future directions. This findings from this study has the potential to impact working lives of CRTs by emphasising the advantages of their role. CRTs have the ability to make meaningful contributions to schools and its students through their unique position on the boundary of school communities.

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Appendix A of this thesis has been removed as it may contain sensitive/confidential content

Appendix B Interview schedule

Section 1 Participant background

1. What degree did you undertake at university, and when did you graduate?
2. How long have you been working as a CRT?
3. Did you willingly choose to work as a CRT, or was it out of necessity?
4. How did you get your 'foot in the door' for the schools you've worked at?
5. Have you worked 'blocks' at certain schools?
   a) How many blocks were undertaken, and how long for each block?
   b) If you haven't worked any blocks, how many days on average do you work per week as a CRT?
   c) Are you satisfied with the amount of work you're getting?

Section 2: CRT strengths

1. What do you consider to be the advantages of working as a CRT?

2. What strengths have you developed during the course of your work?

3. Do you think you have impact on student learning? If so, how?

Section 3: Learning on the periphery

1. What have you learnt about teaching as the result of working as a CRT?

2. What did you learn about the different school communities?

3. Did you get access to any formal or informal opportunities to further your learning as a teacher? (E.g. professional learning sessions, staff meetings, mentoring). If so, what did you gain from it?

4. Did you get access to any formal or informal mentoring and/or induction at the school(s) you have worked at? If so, what did you gain from it?

Section 4: CRT influences on school community

1. Were there any opportunities for you make changes (however small) upon school communities in terms of its routines or policies? How did these changes come about?

2. How have you been able to contribute to life of the schools you've worked at?

3. Have your work as a CRT been valued by the school community? How do you know?

Section 5: Conclusion

1. If you could express being CRT as a metaphor, what metaphor would you use?

2. Any other comments you wish to make?

Appendix C of this thesis has been removed as it may contain sensitive/confidential content